University of Dundee

University of Dundee

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Paintings and their irreducibility to explanation myth and multiform aesthetic experience

Milburn, J. H.

Award date:
2011

Link to publication

General rights
Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

Take down policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Download date: 05. May. 2023

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Paintings and their irreducibility to explanation

myth and multiform aesthetic experience

J. H. Milburn

2011

University of Dundee

Conditions for Use and Duplication
Copyright of this work belongs to the author unless otherwise identified in the body of the thesis. It is permitted to use and duplicate this work only for personal and non-commercial research, study or criticism/review. You must obtain prior written consent from the author for any other use. Any quotation from this thesis must be acknowledged using the normal academic conventions. It is not permitted to supply the whole or part of this thesis to any other person or to post the same on any website or other online location without the prior written consent of the author. Contact the Discovery team (discovery@dundee.ac.uk) with any queries about the use or acknowledgement of this work.

PAINTINGS AND THEIR IRREDUCIBILITY TO EXPLANATION.

MYTH AND MULTIFORM AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE.

A PRACTICE LED FINE ART PHD.

J. H. MILBURN

PAINTINGS AND THEIR IRREDUCIBILITY TO EXPLANATION

MYTH AND MULTIFORM AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

A PRACTICE LED FINE ART PHD.

JONATHAN HENRY MILBURN

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Fine Art.

The University of Dundee

June 2011

Contents

List of Figures

Declaration

The present thesis, *Paintings and their Irreducibility to Explanation: Myth and Multiform Aesthetic Experience. A Practice Led Fine Art PhD* has been composed entirely by the candidate undersigned. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other previous qualification. The research was carried out by the candidate unless acknowledged otherwise, and all verbatim quotes have been clearly distinguished by quotation marks, and their sources of information have been duly acknowledged.

Signed

Doctoral Candidate Date: / / /

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my wife Eisquel Herrera, and my daughter Lilia Isabelle. Also to suegra Heydy Alvarez, my mother Jean Muriel Milburn, sadly missed, and my father Professor Harry Milburn, all of whom without whose love, support and consideration this would not have been possible.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Ramiz and Raifa Subasic for your openness, warmth, and hospitality. To Denis Rutowitz, chairperson of Edinburgh Direct Aid, and all at Edinburgh Direct Aid for providing me with the opportunity of contribute to your efforts in Bosnia.

To my supervisor Murdo MacDonald, Professor of History of Scottish Art, University of Dundee. I would like to thank for his support, patience, and humour in the face of adversity. I acknowledge his professionalism and commitment to providing high quality supervision.

Slàinte mhòr a h-uile là a chì's nach fhaic!

I am also grateful to my second supervisor Mary Modeen, artist, academic and Senior Lecturer in Fine Art, and Art, Philosophy and Contemporary Arts Practice, at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, University of Dundee, for her continued patience, support and invaluable constructive feedback.

My thanks to painter Alan Robb, Professor of Fine Art, for his guidance, practical expertise and passion for painting. Dr Meg Bateman for help with Gaelic translation. Professor James Williams, School of Philosophy, at the University of Dundee, for his encouragement in pursuing an interdisciplinary approach, and guidance concerning aesthetics and political philosophy.

My gratitude also to all the members of staff from the School of Fine Art, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, University of Dundee, including Jackie Ritchie and all staff in the Fine-Art office, Derrick Guild, Kevin Henderson, Eddie Summerton, Tracy Mackenna and Mark Wallace. Thank you also to all the staff of the Fine art workshop for their vital technical advice, support, and enthusiasm.

I am grateful for the support of my family and friends –Rebecca Milburn, Jessica Milburn, Lilian De Jaimes, Roberto Jaimes, Mildreth De Perez, Gerly Jaimes, Roberto Jose Jaimes, all members of White Watch Dunfermline. Finally to Orinoco Milburn for overseeing the entire study with affection.

Preface

The impulse for this PhD was a three-week journey to post-conflict Bihać province of north-western Bosnia, in winter of 1999, to deliver aid on behalf of Edinburgh Direct Aid. Having watched Peter Kosminsky's BBC drama *Warriors*[1] I felt motivated to take advantage of my HGV license, and deliver aid to people whose lives had been affected by the conflict in Bosnia. Although this was not my intention at the time, the subject of the PhD became my later attempts to manifest, explore, and communicate such experience through painting. It would be neglectful of me to continue without providing some background to the war itself.

The Bosnian War was a conflict that took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina between April 1992 and December 1995; a consequence of territorial instability in former Yugoslavia. The war was between Bosnian Serb forces, the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Bosnian Croat forces. In particular, this instability was exploited for Serbian territorial gain. Thus Serb leader Slobodan Milošević exploited historic ethnic suspicions to promote Serbian nationalistic identity, in order to initiate and sustain conflict, to divide and conquer. BBC News claimed that Milošević was:

> …a firebrand of Serbian nationalism. By lifting the lid on the long-standing taboo of national and ethnic rivalries, he reinvented himself as a charismatic leader of the Serbs.[2]

According to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) the war was characterised by: the bombing of civilians, ethnic cleansing, widespread rape, including Serbian rape-camps in which women as young as 12 years old were repeatedly raped, and genocide. Atrocities such as the Srebrenica massacre, the Siege of

[1] *Warriors,* 1999. Directed by KOSMINSKY, P. U.K.: BBC.
[2] BBC. 2011. *milosevic_yugoslavia* [Online]. Available: http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/in_depth/europe/2000/milosevic_yugoslavia/rise.stm.

Sarajevo, and the Omarska concentration camp run by Bosnian Serb forces, defined this war:

> According to legal experts, as of early 2008, 45 Serbs, 12 Croats and 4 Bosnians were convicted of war crimes by the ICTY in connection with the Balkan wars of the 1990s. Genocide is the most serious war crime Serbs were convicted of. Crimes against humanity (i.e. ethnic cleansing), a charge second in gravity only to genocide, is the most serious war crime Croats were convicted of. Breaches of the Geneva Conventions is the most serious war crime Bosniaks were convicted of.[3]

Regardless of broader political considerations, such as machinations of external states in the sponsorship of such genocide[4], this thesis is not *about* the war in Bosnia. Rather, it considers the limitations of communicating such experience through arts practice.

[3] ICTY. 2011. *United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia* [Online].
[4] ALDRICH, R. J. 2002. *America used Islamists to arm the Bosnian Muslims*

The Srebrenica report reveals the Pentagon's role in a dirty war [Online]. The Guardian.

A small selection of photographs that I took of the town of Ključ, Bihać province of north-western Bosnia, winter 1999, home of Ramiz and Raifa Subasic.

Ramiz and Raifa Subasic, 1999.

Summary

This Ph.D. consists of a written thesis developed alongside seventeen original oil paintings. The original purpose was to examine through thesis how creative painting practice and a reconsideration of myth in word and image would, or could, express my experience of post-war Bosnia in 1999. In light of the limitations identified with such an approach during the course of this study, the thesis became an analysis of the ways in which we explain art, focussing upon aspects of mythic explanation in particular.

For example, by reconsidering James Macpherson's national epic Romantic myth *The Poems of Ossian*, I was able to study the main issues involved. Key writers include Joseph Campbell (1949), Carl Jung (1966) and Levi- Strauss (1963/1968), before finally considering Wittgenstein's (1979) remarks on myth. Key contemporary artists include American Pop Surreal painters.

The focus of this thesis is not explicitly about the war in Bosnia. It is not necessarily about myth, or of aesthetics philosophy, and it is not exclusively about the series of 17 original oil paintings developed during the course of this study. Rather this study concerns the way in which all of these elements combine to provide the rich and diverse human cultural experience we know as art. It considers thinking about the way in which art engages with the world, from an artist's perspective.

The original contribution to knowledge arises from the way in which this study combines theory, practice and experience. The objective was therefore for original works of art to become the key to more interesting theorizing, and vice versa. The thesis concludes that painting is irreducible to explanation, and considers key research areas for future critical discourse.

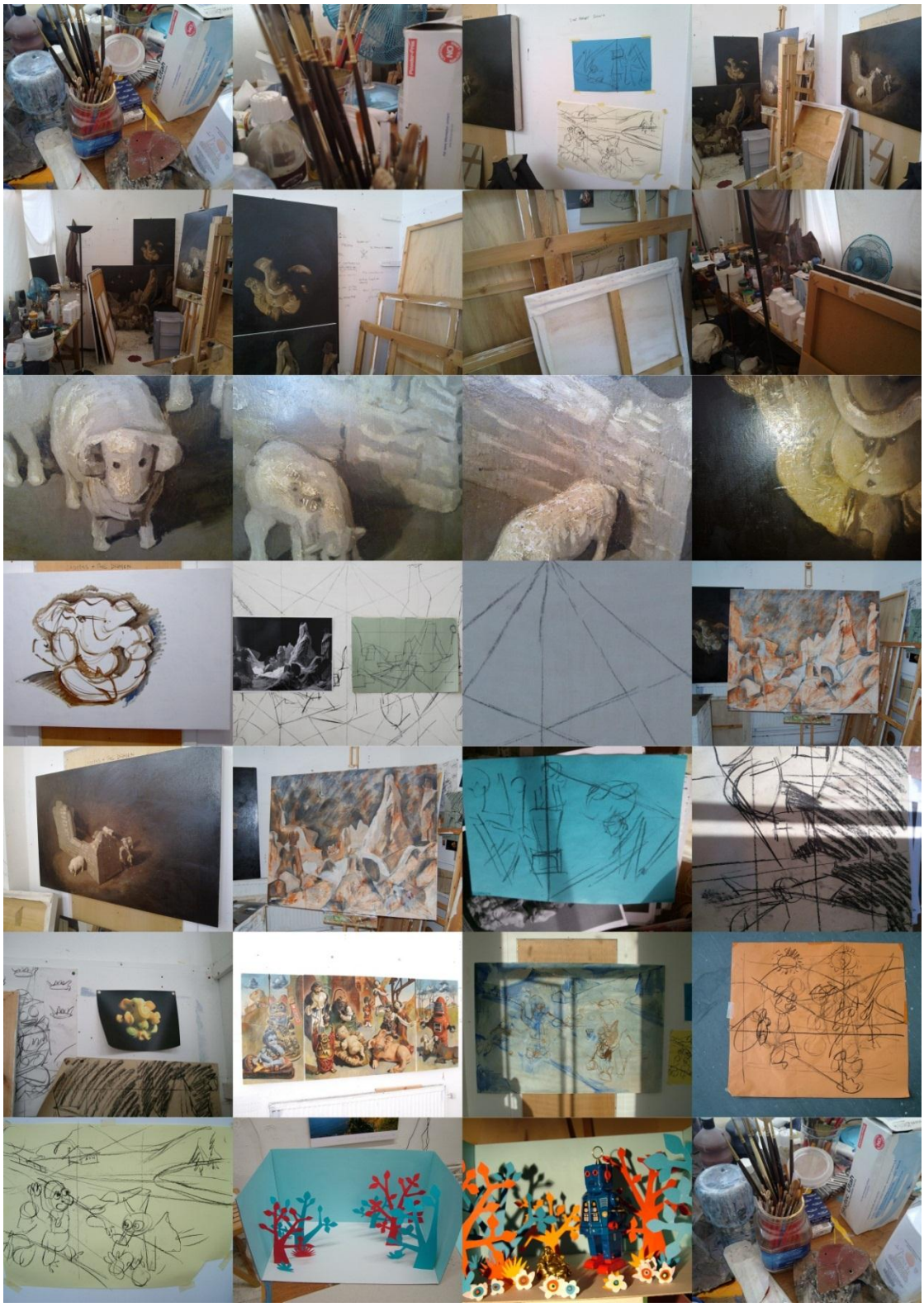

Figure 1. *STUDIO SHOTS: PAINTING AND MAQUETTE DETAILS*

Chapter 1: Introduction and Overview

This chapter introduces the main elements of the study, and provides an overview of the subject area.

1.1 The Complexity-Accepting Position

The study involved the development of several original oil paintings over a 4-year period. Both painting and writing processes informed one another; creative painting process was reflected upon through thesis, in essays, lectures, and presentations for conference.

However, Terrence Hawkes (1993) identifies that the analysis of art has moved from the art object itself, towards a process of interpretation that previously was assumed relatively unproblematic[5]. Elements such as the agenda of the interpreter become included in the many features that determine the meaning of a work of art. This thesis therefore addresses this problematic of the rigorous analysis of meaning in artwork. It focuses upon perceived limitations of various artist/ artwork models as explanation of arts practice and analysis, in order to understand more accurately the experience of communication through art.

A critical approach is taken that considers Joseph Campbell's universalising notions of myth; Wittgenstein's reflections upon the otherness of myth, as applied by G.L. Hagberg (1995) ; and Polish science-fiction writer Stanislaw Lem's (1983) approach to ideas of strangeness and theories of communication in his satirical science fiction novel His Master's Voice . There are extracts of *HMV* by Lem inserted throughout the thesis to draw parallels to the main text; these are indicated by embedded pictograms.

[5] JANCOVICH, M. 1993. *The Cultural Politics of the New Criticism,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. Pg. 8

This study is aimed at those with an interest in contemporary art, and contemporary approaches to painting, rather than those who are interested solely in myth, art history, or the philosophy of visual communication. To these people, this undertaking may appear superficial; however, this broad interdisciplinary approach is crucial in order to develop a critical discourse that addresses art as an infinitely multi-faceted human cultural event. Our understanding and experience of art is deeply rooted in theories of the mind, philosophies of language, and concepts of history, of anthropology, of education, of perception, and a great many other forms of knowledge. This subject area, consequently, demands an approach whose scope addresses complexity, as opposed to the simplification of the issues involved. This thesis proposes therefore that art, and painting in particular, denies restriction to a single unifying explanation. Therefore, this interdisciplinary enquiry combines elements of literature, psychology, philosophy, and critical cultural studies.

1.2 Stanislaw Lem and Socratic Method

The structure of this thesis is loosely adapted from the narrative of Polish science fiction writer Stanislaw Lem's novel *His Master's Voice* (1983) (hereafter abbreviated as *HMV*) that draws upon aspects of Socratic Method in order to present a critical examination of the limits of communication and interpretation. The Socratic Method is an effective way of discounting hypothesis and assumptions that lead to error. This involves an examination of several alternate viewpoints with the intention of illuminating ideas. This approach has been denigrated because of its aggressive application in law, but its open-endedness and tendency to perplex is particularly appropriate for aesthetic and artistic concerns.

Stanislaw Lem's novel *His Master's Voice* is the tale of the accidental discovery by scientists of a neutrino beam from a distant constellation that may or may not be a message from outer space, or 'message from the stars' (hereafter abbreviated as MFTS). Unfortunately, the scientists find it impossible to understand what the message may mean. From this starting point, Lem's novel develops into an analysis of the limits of human understanding in methods of interpretation.

In *HMV*, rather than presenting a (philosophical) problem and its solution, Lem presents us with the problematic of the explanation. Scientific method, unlike Socratic enquiry, would often lead us to believe that what is not measurable cannot be investigated. Yet this viewpoint fails to address such paramount human concerns as sorrow and joy, suffering and love.

Stanislaw Lem is important because he takes a creative interdisciplinary approach, combining philosophical theory with literature. *His Master's Voice* is an exploratory analysis of a variety of explanatory perspectives, and a satire on how such analysis is ultimately corrupted by personal, professional and political ambition, asserting Lem's argument that analysis and interpretation are never neutral.

The decision to use Lem was made through the desire to maintain a scholarly pathway through issues of understanding and diversity. Lem's *HMV* represents the way in which multiple and often-conflicting narratives may co-exist within a novel.

For example, Lem does not narrate *HMV*; rather, this is the task of his fictional character Professor Peter E. Hogarth, who is a brilliant career scientist and mathematician. Hogarth is characterised by his ambition, and his profound lack of empathy, and it is likely that his failure to interpret the mysterious message from the stars is due to this very failing. Consequently, Lem's work often focuses on issues of humility in the face of lack of understanding.

This paper considers themes of his novel *His Master Voice* in particular, because it is concerned with the breakdown of understanding in interpretation, a characteristic of the strategic aggression of the cold war. Lem repeatedly describes science fiction as 'the myth of the 21st Century'; notably, this does not include all science fiction, however, the majority of which he describes as formulaic and reactionary.[6]

1.3 Rationale for the Study

A work of art, such as a painting, is considerably more than its explanation.

At a very rudimentary level paintings are typically categorized as figurative/ representational and abstract. Figurative art, describes artwork which are clearly derived from real sources, and are therefore by definition representational. By way of contrast, abstract painting is sometimes used to describe art which has no derivation from figures or objects. However regarding art, such categorization is fraught with difficulty, not lastly because, as Morris Weiz warns, such categorization is likely to foreclose on creativity in contemporary art[7]. Following a neo-Wittgensteinian approach, Weiz argues that there is no single underlying essence to art, and no such simple definition can be possible. However, this does not mean that we cannot talk meaningfully about art[8].

At some stage, the artist will be required to explain the work that they have created. Whether at a critique with fellow students; during a tutorial; applying to postgraduate education, for example; preparing an application for research funding; promoting work at a gallery; developing a personal statement of work for a website; or perhaps publishing a manifesto of social intention that tells the world precisely what they hope to achieve. Sometimes the artist must explain, and review aspects of the work to themselves as a part of a creative process of cyclical reflection; or explain their work to

[6] LEM, S. 1973. On the Structural Analysis of Science Fiction. *Science Fiction Studies,* 1. Pg. 28
[7] WARBURTON, N. 2003. *The art question,* Abingdon, Routledge. Pg. 72
[8] Ibid. Pg. 72

other artists in order to associate with like-minds, and collectively take their work forward. The success of artwork can stand or fall on the effectiveness of explanation. Importantly, if an artist can understand and communicate the intentions for their artwork, it gives their work impact. Therefore, it is essential that artists, and writers on art, understand the limits to the explanation of art.

Art provides a unique way of thinking and encountering the world. Yet the artist's reflective inner process typically struggles to bridge the gap with the external academic requirement for explanation. Ways of explaining art and the creative process do not always 'fit' the familiar creative model of the individual artist's rigorous attention to the visual, sonorous, or tactile human cultural experience.

The explanation of art is problematic in many ways. The viewer's ability to identify images with referents in the world influences the way in which we explain a work of art. As will be discussed in detail later in this thesis, the treatment of this representation must be seen as significant, in material forms determined by a language of colour, brush stroke, transparency and opacity (for example). In fact, the explanation of art personifies meanings that are often contradictory, may be at odds with one another, and whose accuracy may vary greatly. This thesis considers ways of attempting to explain meaning in art, and the limits to the explanation of art.

1.4 Meaning in Art

According to Susan Langer (1957), there is a basic human need to create meaning, and to invest meaning in one's world[9]. For Langer, the human mind is constantly carrying on a process of symbolic transformation of the experiential data that come to it, causing it to be a fountain of more or less spontaneous ideas. Langer says:

[9] LANGER, S. K. 1957. *Philosophy in a new key: A study in the symbolism of reason, rite and art,* London, Harvard University Press.pg.52

> …It is necessary to examine more accurately that which makes *symbols* out of anything – out of marks on paper, the little squeaks and grunts we interpret as "words", or bended knees – the quality of *meaning*, in its several aspects and forms[10].

Additionally Stephen C. Ausband (2000) claims that as human beings, we need to find meaning in the world, and furthermore, that myth provides important ways in which we emphasise and create meaning[11].

> Human beings need to find some sort of order in their world, and the system of tales and traditions we call mythology is a primary way of reinforcing that order[12].

Therefore, this thesis looks specifically at qualities of myth in terms of determining and exploring meaning in art. However, according to James Elkins (2001) we currently diminish the rigorous examination of meaning in art.

1.5 Thesis Structure

Chapter 1 provides an introduction and overview to the study. It begins by delineating the overall subject area of this interdisciplinary practice based study. The chapter makes explicit my initial assumptions of the creative arts process. It also introduces some of the main elements to the research approach, namely, the Scottish National Romantic myth, James Macpherson's *Poems of Ossian*; Polish Science Fiction writer Stanislaw Lem's novel *His Masters Voice*; several approaches to the understanding myth in word and image; key contemporary American *Pop Surreal* painters; and Wittgenstein's reflections upon myth.

---

[10] Ibid. Pg.52
[11] AUSBAND, S. C. 2000. *Myth and Meaning, Myth and Order,* Macon, GA, Mercer University Press Pg. 1
[12] Ibid. Pg.1

Chapter 2 then presents photographs of 17 original oil paintings developed over a 4-year period, during the course of this study. These were developed whilst reflecting upon issues of myth, historicism, theory and experience as part of the painting process, and were produced as practice-led research in conjunction with this PhD. The paintings are presented in reverse chronological order, and will be exhibited September 2011, alongside the written thesis, at the Dundee Contemporary Arts Centre.

Chapter 3 presents an explanation of these paintings based upon artist's intention, before discussing the apparent limitations of this approach.

Chapter 4 introduces further ways of explaining what contemporary artwork means, including both formal and audience based perspectives, before again, considering the limitations to such approaches.

Chapter 5 then reviews theories of myth; their application to art, and arts analysis, and considers the degree to which forms of mythic analysis may address issues of historicism and social context. The limitations of a mythic approach are then considered.

Chapter 6: Given the apparent insufficiency of the aforementioned approaches to explain the richness and diversity integral to our experience of art, this chapter then considers a more sceptical viewpoint to art explanation based upon Wittgenstein's reflections upon myth. This chapter thereby presents several thought experiments based upon Hagberg's interpretation of Wittgenstein's ideas.

Chapter 7 Sums up the findings of this study of the many (though by no means exhaustive) ways of explaining artwork, before concluding that painting and art are irreducible to such methods of explanation.

1.6 My Initial Assumptions

At the beginning of this study, I set myself the task of creatively manifesting through drawing and painting my inner response to a trip to post-war Bosnia. The intention was to analyse the paintings using theory. It was fundamental to the study that the thesis interacts with original artwork. During the course of this study, reflecting upon my arts practice and interpretation, I soon found difficulties with this apparently straightforward approach. It was crucial that I re-examine my core assumptions about the ways in which I understand arts practice.

The term aesthetics comes from the Greek for 'faculty of feeling'[13]. Intuitively therefore it seemed correct that my artwork for this study should arise from reflection upon feelings stemming from this dramatic experience in my life. It seems common sense that such manifest emotion is a prerequisite of good artwork.

James Elkins (2001) claims that this is a widespread assumption about art and the creative process, that is has its roots in a 19thC Romantic model of the relationship between artist and painting[14]. Individual subjectivity and emotion were extolled, in reaction to perceived constraints of rationalism imposed by the Enlightenment[15]. *Sturm und Drang* (Storm and Urge, or Stress) is such a movement in German art from the late 1760s and its precursor *Kraftmensch*, is identified by the way in which there should be no motivation outside the self, and should not be qualified by rationalism. Thus individuality and 'expression was the key to revelation'.[16]

---

[13] Online Etymological Dictionary. Available: http://www.etymonline.com/index.php.
[14] ELKINS, J. 2001. *Why Art Cannot Be Taught: A Handbook For Art Students,* Chicago, The University of Illinois Press. Pg.27
[15] VAUGHAN, W. 1978. *Romanticism and Art,* London, Thames and Hudson World of Art. Pg.47
[16] Ibid. Pg. 47

1.7 *Ossian* and Pop Surrealism

Painter Henry Fuseli (1741-1825) was closely associated with the literary instigators of this Romantic Movement, and became obsessed with powerful and positive art. Fuseli responded to the myths and legends of Northern Europe as much as the Greek myths, and was fascinated by their heroic and erotic possibilities.[17] According to Michael H. Duffy (1958), painter Henri Fuseli's works are often imbued with passion, mystery and drama. His figures are bursting with intensity and dynamism, and Fuseli' work embodies the grotesque humour of myth and fairy tale[18].

Fuseli spent the years 1770-78 in Italy, and became fascinated by the drama of Michelangelo's statues against a gloomy sky, or illuminated by lightning. Duffy argues that Fuseli used compositional exaggeration similar to Michelangelo allied to themes of the uncanny, the mystical and the mythic to advance his painting. His technique included deliberately exaggerating the proportions of the figures and throwing his figures into uncomfortable contortions.

Fuseli was fluent in French, Italian, English and German. According to Duffy his writings contain passages of the best art-criticism that English literature can show. The principal work is his series of Lectures in the Royal Academy, twelve in number, commenced in 1801.

His fascination with the bizarre is derived from many of his literary subjects, for example, he painted several works for Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery in London, a project initiated in 1786 by engraver and publisher John Boydell to nurture a school of British history painting.

---

[17] Ibid. Pg. 48

[18] DUFFY, M. H. 1995. Michelangelo and the Sublime in Romantic Art Criticism. *Journal of the History of Ideas,* 56**,** 216-238.

According to Duffy, Fuseli was an influential figure in his lifetime, but his work was generally neglected for about a century after his death until the Expressionists and Surrealists saw in him a kindred spirit[19].

Consequently, Fuseli was part of the second wave of artists that became interested in James Macpherson's version of *Ossian*'s works that caused a sensation when they first appeared in the 1760's. The subsequent patronage of Napoleon and the key works from French artists stemmed directly from Fuseli's work. The myth of *Ossian* was not so much a subject for illustration as a central element of these artists' philosophy. According to art historian Thomas Crow (1995)

> They were true believers who took the Ossianic Verse as more pure and primitive even than the poetry of archaic Greece.[20]

According to Donald Kuspit (2006), these artists were the beginning of a modern sensationalism and kitsch romanticism. For example, Girodet's *Ossian* paintings puzzled expert critics with their symbolism and upset them with their departure from classical tradition, but for the public, the paintings were hugely popular because they were so strange, or 'bizarre', to use the artist's term.[21]

An equivalent contemporary kitsch sensationalism might be the paintings of Pop Surrealism, stemming originally from west coast America.

---

[19] Ibid.
[20] MACDONALD, M. 2004. Ossian and Art: Scotland into Europe via Rome. *In:* GASKILL, H. (ed.) *The Reception of Ossian in Europe*
London: Continuum. Pg.401
[21] KUSPIT, D. 2006. *GIRODET'S SENSATIONALISM* [Online]. Artnet. Available: http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/kuspit/kuspit8-16-06.asp.

Figure 2. Ryden. M, (2006), *'66 LOGGING TRUCK,* [oil on canvas, 30.5 x 66cm] Michael Kohn Gallery

The work of artists such as Mark Ryden and Todd Schorr, for example, embody a symbolic plurality that embraces notions of cultural difference and minority interest. Pop Surrealism is also typically saturated with nostalgic Americana, and is characterised by an ironic technical painterliness.

Figure 3. Schorr. T, (2003), *THE EVOLUTION OF SUPERSTITION,* [acrylic on canvas, 76.2 x 61cm] Merry Karnowsky Gallery

These are the key influences to my painting approach from a stylistic viewpoint; my work involves an interest in the symbolism of cultural diversity, the history of painting, and a creative anti-rationalism.

My assumption of art was of the romantic dualistic art/artist model. However, Hagberg (1995) proposes that such a dualistic, Romantic approach presumes an understanding of the complex, if not entirely unassailable relationship between inner subjective world of the artist, and outer social reality of the work of art itself. The risk is that the distinctions between inner and outer become blurred, and the complex relationship is assumed uncritically and unknowingly.

1.8 Ways of Explaining

Consequently, in explaining the meaning of art, the words used to analyse and describe the work of art are not likely to connect with the work of art. Writing about the relationship between the artwork and the inner subjective processes of the artist can become muddled and inaccurate. Often the words used to describe an artwork could apply to any of a thousand other works of art. Works of art – good or bad – are buried under reference to the latest critical theory of psychoanalytic deconstruction[22]. We use theory in the same way that a drunk uses a lamppost: for support rather than illumination.

Keith Kenney (2005) writes that many recent theories such as for example semiotics and phenomenology attempt to express this difficult linkage between internal and external worlds, because they believe that the external world is mediated by our internal mind[23]. Recently this dualistic model is famously associated with Saussure (among many others) who understood the *linguistic sign* as "a two-sided psychological entity", consisting of a sign (in terms of the painting, an expression, representation, mark, symbol) and its meaning, or signified (the inner experience of the painting the content of the mark, of the response in the viewer.)

---

[22] HAGBERG, G. L. 1995. *Art as Language: Wittgenstein, Meaning, and Aesthetic Theory,* New York, Cornell University. Pg. 7

[23] SMITH, K. L. (ed.) 2004. *Handbook of Visual Communication: Theory, Methods, and Media,* London: Routledge. Pg. 99

Yet contemporary approaches to painting that involve, for example, creative experimentation, innovation and improvisation are incompatible with explanation restricted to attempts to attach such theoretical frameworks to the experience of art, and the creative arts process. Consequently, explanatory words of artists and critics are likely to be imprecise at best, and at worst, they may ruin any hope of genuinely understanding the artwork.

From an artistic perspective, despite the fascinating insights afforded, such theories were never entirely adequate ways of communicating and understanding my artwork, and experience of Bosnia. I found that the available approaches to arts analysis did not accurately express meaning of the work because they expressed *a* meaning of artwork, but thereby deflected explanation from other potentially significant ways of understanding. I began to examine alternative theories of art interpretation, in order to understand the limitations of such approaches to art explanation.

1.9 Characteristics of Myth

Curiously, I began to find hope in the consideration of myth in word and image, and theories of mythic form, as a way of explaining and discussing my series of paintings, and the strangeness, complexity, and paradoxical nature of my experience.

There is no one definitive school of myth and there are many ways of understanding the relationship between art and myth. For the purpose of this thesis however, Bernice Slote (1963), says that myth refers occasionally to a classical story, to created forms of belief, or it may function as a symbolic or creative metaphor. Thus, Slote proposes that key elements include doubleness: the sense in which Literature (text in the broadest sense) in language and form ‘is the embodiment of something more that is not, that cannot, be

wholly stated…contains both a literal reference, and a much greater range of unwritten meaning, implication and emotion[24].

This doubleness of myth attracted me to its theoretical inclusion in the artistic process, as a way of representing issues that may otherwise be difficult to refer to directly.

For example, Greek myth such as the House of Thebes tales that include the myth of Oedipus, and Ovid's Metamorphosis, represent in word and image an emotional strangeness of experience that cannot be represented, or communicated literally. Such powerful symbolism in mythic narrative such as these have been a staple for painters for centuries.

Myth is particularly interesting to painters as a method/paradigm for communication of ideas beyond literal representation i.e. Appealing to layered and nuanced non-literal associations. Further ways in which characteristics of myth provide interesting paradigms for painters are discussed later in the thesis.

I also became interested in Scotland's national myth, James Macpherson's *The Poems of Ossian,* because of its nationalistic and romantic associations. I spent time in Finland in the 1990's and was impressed with Axeli-Gallen Kallela's paintings based upon the Finnish national myth, the Kallevala. Joep Leerson (2004) claims that *Ossian* was a precursor to The Kallevala in the sense that Finnish myth belongs to a determined exertion across Europe to reconstitute fragments of oral traditions, not into anthologies, but into an original epic whole[25]. Leerson (2004) argues that these Epics echo one another not in terms of subject matter, but in terms of its 'flavour': its sentimentalism, its themes of loss and historical defeat, its use of liminality and mantic ideas of inspiration. The most far-reaching impact of *Ossian*, claims Leerson, being literary

[24] L.C.KNIGHTS, N. F. (ed.) 1958. *Myth and Symbol,* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. Pg. v
[25] LEERSON, J. 2004. Ossian and the rise of Literary Historicism. *In:* GASKILL, H. (ed.) *The reception of Ossian in Europe.* London: Continuun books. Pg. 122

historicism[26]. However, my series of paintings are not illustrations of *Ossian*, or of any other theory of myth; rather, they contain a flavour, to use Leerson's term, of James Macpherson's epic.

Furnished with this intrigue in a deep understanding through mythically informed approaches to art, I sought to structure my creative practice and academic studies in such a way as to make more sense of my experiences, in a way that is not literal or articulated rational sense, but 'mythic sense'.

1.10 Myth and Art

As Elkins suggests, consideration of the meaning of art, mythological or otherwise, has fallen from fashion. It is the intention of this thesis to reconsider the analysis of artwork employing theories of myth in a contemporary sense.

According to some writers, myth plays a formative role in society. Claude Levi Strauss claimed that pre-industrial society myth served to reconcile symbolically formal contradictions within society that are inevitable in sustaining tolerance. [27] E. C. Cuff, Wes W. Sharrock, D. W. Francis (1998) argue that ultimately such contradictions cannot be resolved, despite the hope offered by myth of resolution, and so myth may be, as Marx suggests, a form of collective delusion.[28] Cuff, Sharrock, and Francis go on to explain, however, that myth in this sense is not a product of human consciousness, but an important social manifestation of the unconscious, that functions in maintaining social structures, in an imperceptible way:

> …the individual tellings of the myths are only instances of the operation of the general, unconsciously operating pattern of the human mind. The tellers of the

[26] Ibid. Pg.122
[27] SHARROCK, D. W. F. E. C. C. W. W. 1998. *Perspectives in Sociology: Classical and Contemporary* London, Routledge. Pg. 217
[28] Ibid. Pg. 217

> myths are therefore providing only partial realisations of a complex system of pattern of possibilities. The individual teller does not create the basic pattern for producing the telling of the particular myth. Consequently, we can only understand this basic pattern properly by seeing the way it is worked out across the whole range of myths.[29]

This social and individual importance of myth stemmed from Jungian and Freudian psychoanalysis that embraced such mythic symbolism, and critics and artists alike have appropriated psychoanalytic reference to myth. The Surrealists, for example, explicitly engage theories of myth and the unconscious.

Mythographer Joseph Campbell (1949) also took a partly Jungian approach in considering similarities in the role and function of myth across the ages, and across cultures. Literature critic Maud Bodkin (1934) became the first to apply successfully such theories of the mind to provide deep analysis of literature[30]. Bodkin's ideas were further developed by Canadian critic Northrop Frye who united phenomenological concerns with methods of literature analysis.

However, writers such as Wilson, Jacobsen, Thorkild, et al (1963) claim that mythic considerations apprehend reality and attend to its troubles, even by today's standards. Thus, they claim that mythic thought satisfies a human need beyond scientific answers or methods:

[29] Ibid. Pg. 217
[30] BODKIN, M. 1934. *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry: Psychological Studies of Imagination,* London, Oxford University Press. Pg.1

> For man does not quite succeed in becoming a scientific object to himself. His need of transcending chaotic experience and conflicting facts leads him to seek a metaphysical hypothesis that may clarify his urgent problems.[31]

Italian writer Giambattista Vico identified in *New Science* (1725) the way in which myth provides equivalences for how we comprehend reality. Vico explained a profound association between human creativity, myth, meaning and culture. According to Vico, man constructs institutions and society, as he perceives it, through the poetic wisdom and metaphor of myth.

Although early Renaissance paintings of myth were initially considered a novelty, the partnership of painting and myth together has been a dominant art form for over 500 years[32].

1.11 Cross-cultural Understanding

Myth was reconsidered because allegedly universal elements of myth permit the consideration of issues of cross-cultural understanding. This is important because firstly, with regard to Bosnia, I became aware that understanding of the conflict and my personal experiences of its aftermath involved translation of understanding across cultures. In addition, I began to realise that associated theories of difference were central to a broader understanding of events in Bosnia. For example, Noel Malcolm (1994) argues that, Milošević galvanised Serb nationalism by using theories of difference to exploit fear of the other, and take advantage of a lack of cross-cultural understanding[33].

---

[31] JACOBSEN, H. F. M. H. A. F. J. A. W. T. 1963. *Before Philosophy: The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man,* Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Penguin Books Ltd. Pg. 12

[32] BULL, M. 2006. *The Mirror of the Gods: Classical Mythology in Renaissance Art,* London, Penguin Books. Pg. 60

[33] MALCOLM, N. 1994. *Bosnia: A Short History,* London, MacmillanPublishers Ltd.

Yet James Elkins (2003) claims that practitioners and providers of visual art disregard an historical approach to art that a study of myth implies. Elkins asserts that that myth may often be considered out of touch with current issues, and artists concentrate on a form of understanding determined entirely by how the artwork 'looks':

> …visual culture can appear lacking in historical awareness transfixed by a simplified notion of visuality.[34]

The consideration of the meaning of art, mythological or otherwise, has fallen from fashion. The starting intention of this thesis therefore, was to reconsider the analysis of contemporary artwork employing aspects of myth.

In fact, according to art historian Anne D'Alleva (2005), typically analysis of artwork is a broad mixture of formal, iconographic, and contextual analysis. Ideally, such theoretically informed ways of analysing artwork are a way of allowing one to think more deeply and critically about an issue.

Yet perhaps the difficulty was not with these particular explanations of art, in mythic or romantic, or historical terms, but with all forms of explanation. This thesis therefore focuses upon such perceived limitations of communication in arts practice and understanding. This thesis therefore considers Wittgenstein's (1979) reflections on Frazer's explanations of myth that suggest scepticism for the explanation of cultural features such as art generally.

This thesis proposes that the painting process is visual research in itself, and paintings manifest a unique form of knowledge, not as 'subject matter content' but as a work which encompasses both content and treatment, thought and gesture, rational reflection and affective content. It is not that the overall presentation has to rely on 'self-evident'

[34] ELKINS, J. 2003. *Visual Studies A Sceptical Introduction,* New York, Routledge. Pg. 23

work. It is that the work is the synthesis of 'how' and the 'what', more than explanation, widening out to include associative experience and interpretation, rather than closing down to what I have already described as limited if purely stated as rational description. To relegate art to the position of supporting evidence is to marginalise what is central to this thesis.

Theories of analysis are not the sole consideration of this thesis, because this would detract from the prominence of art and painting. Rather, this thesis aims to use theory in the context of arts practice, and involves the interaction between theory and practice, with the aim of producing insights into painting as a way of encountering the world.

1.12 Research Approach

1.12.1 Thinking about Thinking

Arts analysis as it is practiced today is one area of focus in this thesis. Discussing this requires the term 'metacognition' that seems almost cliché in the field of educational psychology. What is broadly understood by this word is the awareness of ones thought processes. Metacognition itself can take many forms including learning, problem solving, and knowing about memory[35]. Such processes involve reflecting upon whether we know something, whether we are progressing, or whether we have made a mistake.

This thesis uses associated, critically reflective, approaches drawn from Wittgenstein and Stanislaw Lem to consider various forms of arts analysis. Neither writer explicitly detailed an approach, but applied critical thinking informs their work. By contrast, Hagberg (1995) demonstrates a corresponding approach. In particular, myth is reconsidered as a way of thinking about art practice and as metaphor for the experience of art itself.

[35] DUNLOSKY, J. B., R. A. (ed.) Handbook of Metamemory and Memory [*Handbook of Metamemory and Memory [*London: Psychology Press.

1.12.2 Wittgenstein and Myth

Scottish anthropologist Sir James George Frazer's comparative study of mythology *The Golden Bough* (1914) directly inspired Wittgenstein's later practice. This thesis latterly engages with an approach to philosophy revealed in *Ludwig Wittgenstein's Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough* (1979). Wittgenstein believed that Frazer had failed to do justice to the strangeness, and otherness of the material available to him, and thus demonstrated such mythic strangeness in his own writing.[36]

Zengotita (1989) proposes that Wittgenstein has disagreed with Frazer because Frazer describes myth and ritual of pre-industrial cultures as a flawed attempt to explain the world. However, these flaws are only possible if one attempts to advance an explanation or theory.[37] Wittgenstein asserts that myth and ritualistic behaviour are not explanations or hypotheses about the world, but are behaviours that precede all causal explanations.[38]

> I think one reason why the attempt to find an explanation is wrong is that we have only to put together in the right way what we know, without adding anything, and the satisfaction we are trying to get from the explanation comes of itself. And here the explanation is not what satisfies us anyway.[39]

Wittgenstein's practice of presentation and description considered problems of communication from an ethnological point of view: seeing communication as determined by ways of life and social interaction. As such, this method and practice of philosophy recognises and welcomes concepts of cultural diversity.

---

[36] ZENGOTITA, T. D. 1989 On Wittgenstein's Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough. *Cultural Anthropology,* Vol. 4, . Pg. 392

[37] Ibid. Pg. 392

[38] RHEES, R. (ed.) 1979. *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough,* Chippenham and Eastbourne: The Byrnmill Press Ltd. Pg. 1e

[39] Ibid. Pg.2e

> The characteristic feature of primitive man, I believe, is that he does not act from opinions he holds about things . . . [40]

Wittgenstein (1979) said that there was something "deep about magic" which he wanted to keep in his new approach to philosophy[41]. Thus, Wittgenstein criticises Frazer's *The Golden Bough* for its *explanatory* approach, which made myth and ritual appear as mistakes. In fact, Wittgenstein was renouncing all explanation, not just Frazer's approach to myth.

Hagberg's interpretation of Wittgenstein's tactic is not directly oppositional. It does not disagree explicitly with a statement of explanation. Rather it demonstrates the closely related but other-than terms within the category that are equally true, thus demonstrating the boundaries of the original term.

Thus, for example, if 'painting is like poetry', not only 'how is it like poetry?', but also 'in which other ways can painting be like poetry', that are associated, and thus reveal something of the original assertion?

Harris (1990) explains that Wittgenstein believed philosophical problems derive from language, and that language is a succession of games, each with its own system of rules. Wittgenstein proposed the idea of the language-game to describe structures of language that are related by 'family resemblance'. He argued that communication only has meaning in the context of the rich and diverse activities of human life.[42]

In Lem's HMV the scientists compete to decipher the MFTS, the rules of this particular language game (scientific method) are that the scientist must show how competing concepts are wrong. Thus in this particular situation language games occur when the

---

[40] Ibid. Pg. 12e

[41] ZENGOTITA, T. D. 1989. On Wittgenstein's Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough. *Cultural Anthropology,* 4. Pg. 393

[42] HARRIS, R. 1990. *Language, Saussure and Wittgenstein: How to Play Games with Words (History of Linguistic Thought),* London, Routledge. Pg.97

scientists such as the protagonist Professor Hogarth seek to bolster their reputation across their pertinent scientific communities, by embracing and investing in a specific theory. Language games therefore show that meaning in science is not purely scientific, but that also occurs socially and linguistically. For Jean Francois Lyotard, science is seen as the sole use of the denotative game, in which the rules of the game ain to make a distinction between true and false knowledge.[43]

1.12.3 Lyotard's Language Game

Jean-François Lyotard (1979) drew upon language-games in developing his concepts of the 'metanarrative'[44]. Here, Lyotard's argument runs surprisingly close to Lem's scepticism towards experts in *HMV*:

> It is here, in the mechanism of developing a Life that is simultaneously Subject, that we see a return of narrative knowledge. There is a universal "history" of spirit, spirit is "life," and life is its own self presentation and formulation in the ordered knowledge of all of its forms contained in the empirical sciences. The encyclopaedia of German idealism is the narration of the "(hi)story" of this life-subject. But what it produces is a metanarrative, for the story's narrator must not be a people mired in the particular positivity of its traditional knowledge, or even scientists taken as a whole, since they are sequestered in professional frameworks corresponding to their respective specialities.[45]

[43] SMITH, D. M. J. 1998. *Social science in question,* London, Sage Publishing. Pg. 284
[44] LYOTARD, J. F. 1979. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* Manchester, Manchester University Press. Pg. 34
[45] Ibid. Pg. 34

However, although Wittgenstein's approach is to identify a *multiplicity* of language games a wide range of activities, Lyotard extends this argument to issues of authority, power and legitimation[46].

However, this Wittgenstein's approach does not appear to have been embraced by artists and writers on art. Hagberg (1995) writes:

> It is not clear that his (Wittgenstein's) argument carried out not in aesthetics but in the philosophy of language, has been assimilated by the wider art-theoretical community. [47]

1.12.4 Reconsidering Assumptions

The intention of this thesis is therefore to reconsider assumptions beneath apparently straightforward explanations of art. This thesis concludes with the proposition that a reconsideration of mythic strangeness and complexity may permit the art practitioner a richer understanding of the ways in which art communicates with the world.

This thesis broadly considers hermeneutics: Hermes was the Greek god who delivered and interpreted messages. The term hermeneutics often refers to the interpretation of texts. The limitation of interpretation is a characteristic of Umberto Eco's hermeneutics, for example. In *The Limits to Interpretation* (1990), Eco proposed a theory that limits unrestricted textual interpretation.

This thesis uses the terms 'reading' and 'text' in connection with the analysis of painting. Typically, we would not talk about reading a painting, and applying theories of literature to the visual realm of painting requires a leap from one genre to another. Yet Umberto Eco (1976) builds a bridge across this gap when he states that every

---

[46] Ibid. Pg. 34

[47] HAGBERG, G. L. 1995. *Art as Language: Wittgenstein, Meaning, and Aesthetic Theory,* New York, Cornell University. Pg. 119

cultural phenomenon, including painting can be discussed as communication. Eco argues that although semiotics is concerned with anything that can be taken as a sign, a sign is everything that can be taken as significantly substituting for something else. This thesis likewise takes an interdisciplinary approach and considers theories of literature alongside the analysis of painting.

However, Eco is often criticised for turning his back on his powerful work from 1962, *Opera aperta* (*The Open Work*)[48], in which he argued that literary texts are dynamic fields of meaning. Critics such as Michael Caesar claim that these later revisions have undermined Eco's previous achievements. [49] For example, Eco identified the term 'openwork' in order to explain that much contemporary (postmodern) art is understood in terms of historical justification, or techniques, rather than aesthetics. [50] Eco's idea of open works of art, are those in which the artist has made the decision to leave understanding of the artwork either to the public, or entirely to chance.

> Any work of art can be viewed as a message to be decoded by an addressee. But unlike most messages, instead of aiming at transmitting a univocal meaning the work of art succeeds precisely insofar as it appears ambiguous and open-ended.[51]

Following on from such work, the critical approach of deconstructionist theorists such as Derrida, and Paul de Man, has led to the potential unlimited interpretation of cultural text.

1.13 Conclusion.

This thesis considers ways of explaining, discussing and interpreting the meaning of art. In particular, it re-considers characteristics of mythic strangeness and complexity in

---

[48] ECO, U. 1989. *The Open Work,* New York, Harvard University Press.
[49] CAESAR, M. 1999. *Umberto Eco: philosophy, semiotics, and the work of fiction,* London, Polity. Pg.3
[50] ECO, U. 1989. *The Open Work,* New York, Harvard University Press. Pg. 167
[51] Ibid. Pg. 195

order to present a clearer understanding of communication as part of creative process. It is identified that the experience of art involves a diversity of elements and processes, and that the therefore art is uniquely problematic in terms of explanation.

The following chapter introduces the series of original oil paintings developed during the course of this study, before going on to consider artists intention and other possible ways of determining what these paintings may mean.

Chapter 2. Seventeen Original Oil Paintings

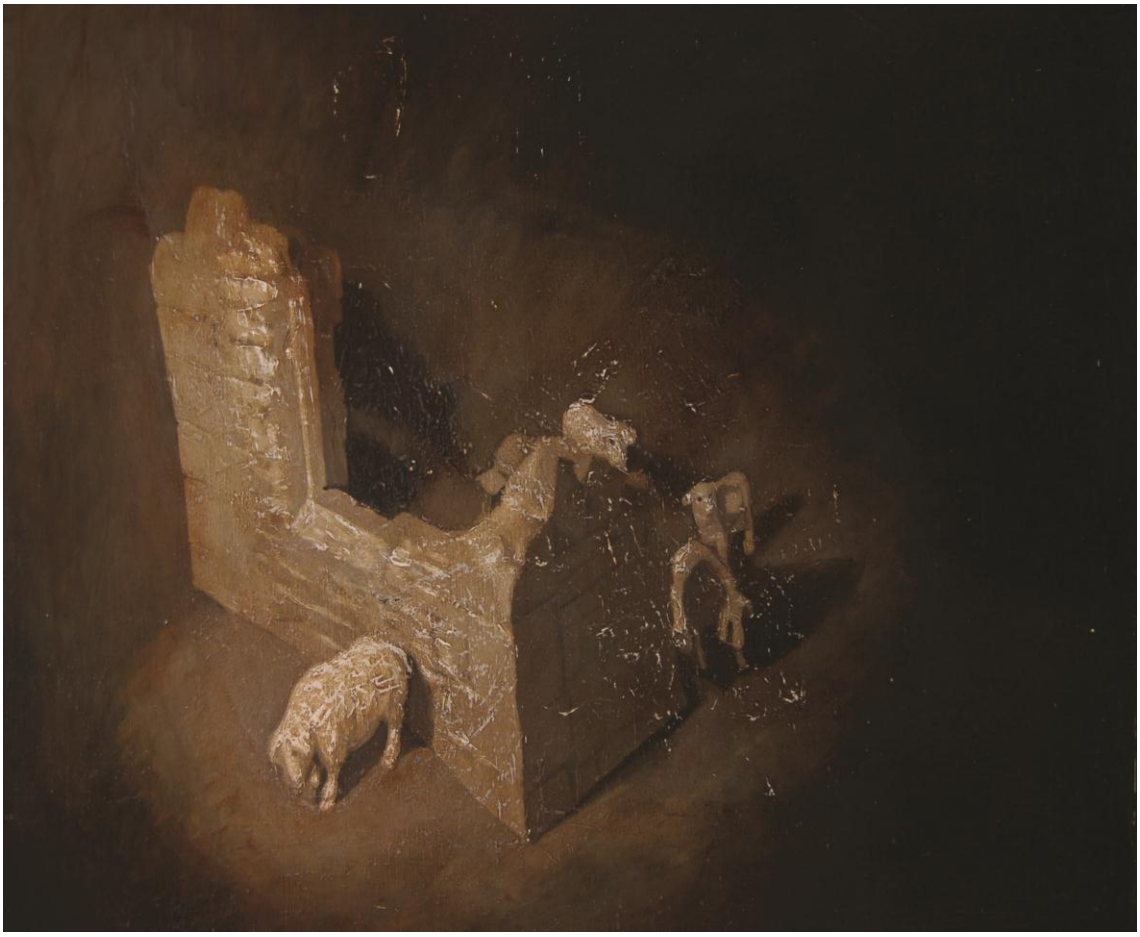

Figure 4. Milburn.J.H. (2009), ***CAORAICH MHEANBHAAN (Tiny Sheep),*** [Oil on board, 150cm x 60 cm]

Figure5. Milburn.J.H. (2009), ***CAORAICH MHEANBHAAN II (Tiny Sheep II),*** [Oil on board, 60cm x 110 cm]

Figure 6. Milburn.J.H. (2009), ***ABII'S GANESHA*** [Oil on board, 70cm x 100 cm]

Figure7. Milburn.J.H. (2009), ***EVEN IN GAIDHLIG, I EXIST,*** [Oil on board, 130cm x 100 cm]

Figure 8. Milburn.J.H. (2008), ***TOY KNIGHT,*** [Oil on board, 80cm x 110 cm]

Figure 9. Milburn.J.H. (2008), ***BERLINER BEAR,*** [Oil on canvas and board, 70cm x 110 cm]

Figure 10. Milburn.J.H. (2008), ***DALEK,*** [Oil on board, 60cm x 90 cm]

Figure 11. Milburn.J.H. (2008), ***FIORENTINA NEVE FINTA***, [Oil on canvas, 30cm x 45 cm]

Figure 12. Milburn.J.H. (2008), ***THE LAST SUPPER,*** [Oil on canvas, 130cm x 110 cm]

Figure 13. Milburn.J.H. (2008), *SAN FRANCESCO d'ASSISI CAMPANA,* [Oil on board, 30cm x 80cm]

Figure 14. Milburn.J.H. (2007), ***OSSIAN'S ADVENTURES IN HYPERREALITY,*** [Oil on board, 10cm x 90 cm]

Figure 15. Milburn.J.H. (2007), ***NACIMIENTO***, [Oil on canvas and board, 180cm x 80 cm]

Figure 16. Milburn.J.H. (2006), ***ROSA MISTICA,*** [Oil on canvas, 110cm x 80 cm]

Figure 17. Milburn.J.H. (2006), ***I SEE CRONOS***, [Oil on canvas, 110cm x 80 cm]

Figure 18. Milburn.J.H. (2006), ***THE DAY OF THE RACE***, [Oil on canvas, 30cm x 60 cm]

Figure 19. Milburn.J.H. (2006), ***CADMUS AND THE DRAGON,*** [Oil on canvas, 110cm x 80cm]

Figure 20. Milburn.J.H. (2006), ***SOLYARIS,*** [Oil on canvas, 110cm x 80cm]

Chapter 3: Artists Intention

3.1 Introduction: Tending towards the Dark Manner

In Stanislaw Lem's novel, *His Master's Voice,* scientists marvelled at the ingenuity of its senders in incorporating a message, which may have included building blocks to create the very essence of life, in a beam of energy that travelled thousands of light years across the universe. Whether the MFTS succeeded in meeting the needs of the sender, they could not determine because they did not know the sender's intention. Scientists ventured that the message must have developed from a superior intelligence because of its very inscrutability. The message was ultimately impenetrable, partly due to an absence of a broader context that included the intention of the alien sender. The intention therefore became the subject of much speculation, ultimately becoming the projection of the scientists' own fears and hostility.

This chapter presents an initial explanation of the apparent artist's intention behind the paintings, before going on to question the validity of such an explanation.

The stylistic impulse for these paintings were recent American Pop Surreal painting. It contains comparative symbolism and reference to comparative mythology. The movement developed from cartoonists such as Robert Williams and Gary Panter, and Robert William's magazine *Juxtapoz* that has encouraged the development of the movement. Further artists associated with this movement include Anthony Ausgang, Glenn Barr, Tim Biskup, Kalynn Campbell, The Clayton Brothers, Joe Coleman, Camille Rose Garcia, Alex Gross, Charles Krafft, Liz McGrath, Scott Musgrove, Niagara, The Pizz, Lisa Petrucci, Mark Ryden, Isabel Samaras, Todd Schorr, Shag, Robert Williams, and Eric White.

Such work is characterised by an iconoclastic plurality of symbols analogous to what contemporary philosopher Jean Francois Lyotard might call visual micro-narratives. Thus, diverse cultural icons are placed in the ironic context of toys and childhood illustration. The paintings make an ironic visual association between the dualisms of serious art, and illustration; the sacred image, and the child's toy; the art object as icon, versus plurality icons.

Formally, my paintings fall into three broad stages of development: Direct painting - colour; Direct painting - tonal; and Indirect painting - tonal. During this study, the subject matter remained consistent. Development within each painting, and from one painting to the next, were primarily formal. Earlier paintings were identified by the attempt to harmonize and unify bright bold colour.[52] By way of contrast, later paintings tended towards tonal chiaroscuro, the so-called dark manner of painting.

The preparatory stages involved creating sets for found and collected objects; photographing and photo-shopping compositions; preparing charcoal sketches for composition; and deciding upon the most effective composition and painting.

I began by understanding the creative process in terms of a 21st century recapitulation of the 19thC Romantic art model. For example, typically I worked feverishly to the paintings conclusion in the isolation of my studio. Vaughan (1978) describes difficulty in pinning down what was meant by the term Romanticism, but of painting says:

[52] Paintings are oil on canvas, oil on board, or oil on linen and board. Smaller than A1, but bigger than A4.
Materials: Winsor & Newton Artists' Oils 120ml and 37ml tubes : Burnt Umber; Titanium White; Ivory Black; Raw Sienna; Naples Yellow; Olive Green; Payne's grey; Venetian Red; Ultramarine (Green Shade); French Ultramarine; Brown Ochre; Raw Umber (Green Shade); Raw Umber Light; Raw Umber (Green Shade); Raw Umber Light; Cadmium red, Cadmium Yellow, Ultramarine blue, Cerulean Blue, Viridian Green, Burnt Umber; Titanium White, Yellow Ochre, Lamp Black.
Zest-It 1ltr; English Distilled Turpentine 250ml; Refined Linseed Oil 250ml
Winsor & Newton's White University Brushes: Synthetic general-purpose artists' brushes

> To preserve this inner inspiration the artist had to be prepared to run the risk of isolation, and this was certainly the price paid by Friedrich and Blake[53].

However, the degree to which such isolation was an aesthetic preference is a matter of conjecture:

> But it was not always a matter of individual choice: artists in general were becoming isolated by social changes, by the growing anonymity of their audience.[54]

I embraced similar stereotypical characteristics, such as attempting to validate my strong emotional response, and intended that my work elevate notions of craft in art, and early cultural convention in art to something more gallant.

Amongst the artworks that I considered from a historical perspective were the Spanish painter Goya's recording of atrocities in his etchings *The Disasters of War* (*Los Desastres de la Guerra*, 1810-1820) a series of 82 prints created by Spanish painter and printmaker Francisco Goya (1746–1828). These were very familiar to me, particularly the similarity to Scottish painter Peter Howson's recordings of the atrocities of the Bosnian war in drawings and paintings.

Peter Howson, who was commissioned by the Imperial War Museum, made two visits to the country along with the United Nations Protection Force. Howson's work provoked debate in the press about the legitimacy of painting 'imaginary' events as opposed to 'factual records'. Howson's work was apparently a response to accounts from rape victims that Howson had encountered in Bosnia[55].

---

[53] VAUGHAN, W. 1978. *Romanticism and Art,* London, Thames and Hudson World of Art. Pg. 25
[54] Ibid. Pg. 25
[55] *Contemporary War Artists: Peter Howson: Bosnia* [Online]. Imperial War Museum Collections. Available: http://collections.iwm.org.uk/server/show/ConWebDoc.912.

This type of work stands as emblematic to painting as both commemorative of, and testament to, stories from an oral tradition. Yet there was a public outcry because Howson's work did not reflect his direct personal experience but was an aggregate of stories that he had heard. This provides an interesting illustration of the general belief in the dualistic model of art, in which artist processes deep inner experience. The painting is supposed to be a manifestation of the artist's experience, thus affirming the problematic duality between inner artistic processes and outer art object. Initially I intended to include something of my authentic response to my first-hand experience of Bosnia. However, I did not feel that it was necessary to replicate what I understood of Howson's work, as a literal representation of some of the more traumatic events in Bosnia. Consequently, I elected to take a more indirect approach that the study of myth seemed to offer.

I also studied Eugène Delacroix' Liberty *Leading the People* (1810) (*La Liberté Guidant le Peuple*).

Figure 21 Delacroix. E. (1830), ***LIBERTY LEADING THE PEOPLE,*** [Oil on canvas, 325 × 260 c m] Louvre Museum

This painting represents the French Revolution of 1830, and illustrates Lady Liberty striding bare breasted over a mound of corpses. Vaughn (1978) describes the painting as ironic and mock heroic[56], which lead me to the possibilities of subtle (and not so subtle) irony within apparently historic and mythic artwork.

I also considered three Romantic paintings whose subject matter is *Ossian*: Anne-Louis Girodet's *Ossian Receiving the Ghosts of French Heroes* (1802).

Figure 22. Girodet. A. L. (1802), *OSSIAN RECEIVING THE GHOSTS OF THE FRENCH HEROES*, [Oil on canvas, 182 X 192 cm] Musée National de Malmaison

Girodet was known as Romantic painter due to his subject matter and emotional content, although his technique stems from the influential French Neoclassical painter Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825). Formally, I found that Girodet was particularly

[56] VAUGHAN, W. 1978. *Romanticism and Art,* London, Thames and Hudson World of Art. Pg.23

interesting because he combined strange colour effects alongside tonal chiaroscuro, as in *The Sleep of Endymion* (1792) that I first saw in the Musée du Louvre in 2006.[57]

Secondly, I considered Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres *Ossian's Dream* (1813)

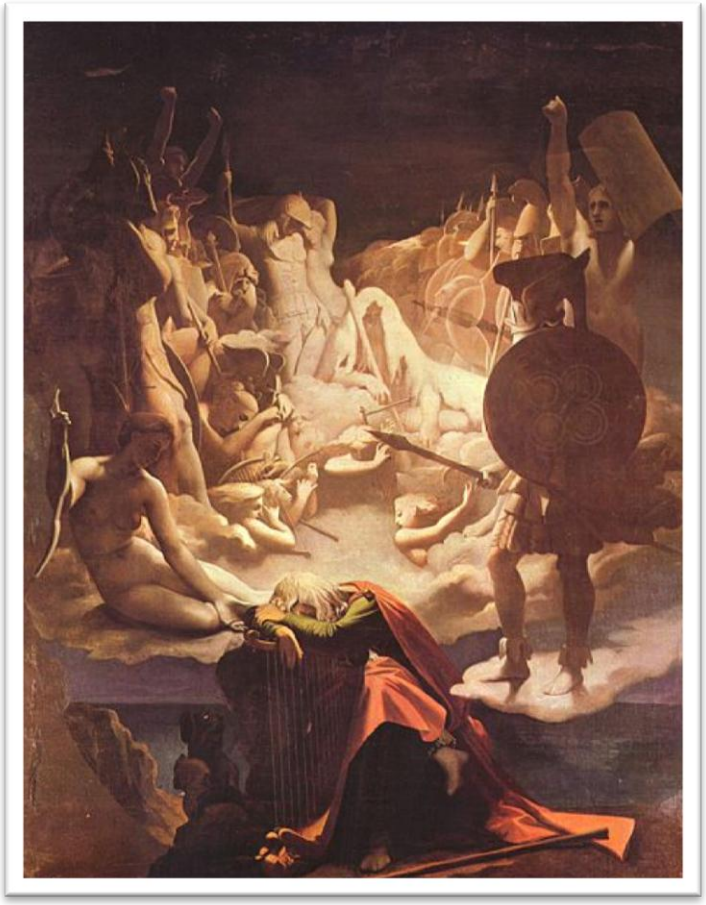

Figure 23. Ingres, A.D. (1813), *OSSIAN'S DREAM,* [Oil on canvas, 348 × 275 cm] Musée Ingres

Ingres' style was also based on David's tenets of Neoclassicism. Finally, I reviewed François Pascal Simon Gérard's *Ossian on the Bank of the Lora, Invoking the Gods to the Strains of a Harp* (1801).

[57] *Web Gallery of Art* [Online]. Available: http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/html/i/ingres/index.html.

Figure 24. Gérard, F.P.S (1801), *OSSIAN ON THE BANKS OF THE LORA INVOKING THE GODS TO THE STRAINS OF THE HARP*, [oil on canvas], Hamburger Kunshalle, Hamburg

Bearing in mind events in Bosnia, I aimed to realize some ironic distance from perceived nationalistic association of 19th century myth such as *Ossian*. I intended for my paintings to express redoubling, in the sense of deflecting criticism by including that which they react against. Thus, my intention was to present an inconsistency between the painterly symbol or expression and the context in which it occurs. For example, this resistance is suggested in the representation of multifarious images of global religious and cultural archetypal icons, such as *Ganesh*, one of the best-known and most widely worshipped deities in the Hindu pantheon, in the context of a Neo-Romantic painterly style that references perceived 19th C Scottish nationalist mythology.

Alternatively, in the instance of my painting *Nacimiento*, the painting was in the spirit of Joseph Campbell's Universalist mythic comparitivism, to place in the context of the nativity scene a variety of cultural icons from across the world: Buddhist; Darwinian;

Hindu; Scottish nationalist; Robot (the last possibly redolent of nostalgic scientific progress?) [58]

This painting included characters from a nativity set brought from Venezuela, while visiting my wife's family for Christmas. The subject of the painting is in fact more literal than it might first appear. The idea came to me on my visit to Venezuela, Christmas 2004, at which time every household and every business, shop and town had a handcrafted nativity scene.

Figure 25. Milburn.J.H. (2008), *NACIMIENTO I, Venezuela* [digital photograph]

[58] 1923, from English translation of 1920 play "R.U.R." ("Rossum's Universal Robots"), by Karel Capek (1890-1938), from Czech robotnik "slave," from robota "forced labor, drudgery,": *Online Etymology Dictionary* [Online]. Available: http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=robot.

Figure 26. Milburn.J.H. (2008), ***NACIMIENTO II, Venezuela,*** [digital photograph]

Figure 27. Milburn.J.H. (2008), ***NACIMIENTO III, Venezuela,*** [digital photograph]

The background setting was also from a nativity painting *The Portinari Altarpiece* (1475), by the Flemish painter Hugo van der Goes, oil on wood triptych painting representing the *Adoration of the Shepherds*. After starting on the painting, I later saw this original painting in Florence, and realised that I had completely underestimated the scale, in reality over 2.5m long, compared to mine that is a little over 1m. This became yet another lesson in the way that paintings in books bear little comparison to the experience of the real thing.

Figure 28. Van der Goes. H. (1476-1478) ***PORTINARI ALTAR PIECE***, [Oil on wood triptych, 253 × 141 cm] Galleria degli Uffizi

My intention for my painting *Even in Gàidhlig, I Exist,* was to place toy sheep in a handcrafted papier-mâché setting that vaguely references the events of the post-Culloden Highland Clearances: the forced displacements of the population of the Scottish Highlands during the 18th and 19th centuries. I wondered to what degree the trashing of Highland culture following the failure of the Jacobite rebellion was dissimilar to the displacement of millions of Bosnians who had Muslim culture trashed by Serbs and Croats.

Thus, in these visual artworks, I aimed to place the emphasis on the opposition between the literal and intended meaning of a visual statement; one thing is said and its opposite

implied. The toy sheep and ruined cottage, for example, mean something more ominous in the context of Scottish Highland History, suggested by the stylistic historical associations of my paintings.

3.2 The Year of the Sheep; *Bliadhna nan Caorachd*

Bumstead (1981) writes that at the end of the 18th Century, sheep farming was seen as the main cause of depopulation and tenant discontent in Highland Scotland. This followed the suppression of the Highlands and the breakup of the clan system, after the Battle of Culloden almost 50 years earlier[59].

Entire districts were depopulated for the farming of sheep, so that where once hundreds of people had once lived, now there were only sheep, a shepherd and a dog[60]. 1792 became known as *The Year of the Sheep; Bliadhna nan Caorachd*, during which over 400 workers from Ross-shire protested by herding South over 6000 of the local sheep[61].

Ironic painting exploits such contradiction in symbol and context (Toy sheep/ child's toy ruin/ Papier-mâché landscape versus ominous historical event/ chiaroscuro history painting) to stress paradoxical aspects of society or the contrast between an ideal and actual set of circumstances, in such a way as to stress the absurdity in the contradiction between substance and form.[62] The question of irony is one of interpretation and articulates how a viewer becomes attuned sensitively to artistic intention.

Irony, according to Stephen David Ross (1982) is an extraordinarily complex phenomenon. He convolutedly describes it as:

---

[59] BUMSTED, J. M. 1981. *People's Clearance: Highland Emigration to British North America, 1770-1815* Winnipeg, University of Manitoba. Pg. 26
[60] Ibid. Pg. 44
[61] Ibid. Pg.45
[62] *Dictionary.com* [Online]. Available: http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/irony.

> A complex or higher level contrast among appearance-reality and overt intersubjective contrasts, which engenders extreme and complex integral- scopic contrasts.[63]

This is to say that irony often reverses our expectation and apprehension of the painting. These reversals can be multiple, may be sophisticated, and often involve a deviation from an established point of view. Importantly these reversals demand that irony is an issue of interpretation, and of how the viewer becomes attuned sensitively to artistic intention.

3.3 The Well-made Painting.

This ironic reversal operates with regard to viewer awareness of context, such as the established canonical artworks with which they engage (or redouble). Similarly, Martin Esslin (1980) recounts how absurdist playwrights of the 1960's and '70's ironically described the established rational naturalist form of theatre in terms of the 'well-made play', a revolt against aristocratic social and political norms of the Age of Enlightenment and a reaction against scientific rationalization.[64]

If I were to explain my paintings with reference to the equivalent well-made painting, I might consider the familiar common-sense rules of painting. Not rules that cannot be broken, but rules that propose best practice, based upon what works, over time. Thus to create an enduring technically well-made painting, the paint should be applied to the supporting structure 'thick over thin and fat over lean'. The initial bottom layers of the painting must be quick drying and the upper layers must be at least as flexible as the under layers beneath them. Paintings should be made in this way. The rules as to what constitutes the well-made painting evolve alongside the canons of oil painting: that

---

[63] ROSS, S. D. 1982. *A theory of art: inexhaustibility by contrast* New York, State University of New York Press. Pg. 184

[64] ESSLIN, M. 1980. *The Theatre of the Absurd,* London, Methuen Drama.

which constitutes the standard by which all works of art must measure. For example, four such canonical painting methods of Renaissance painting have been identified as *sfumato; cangiante; chiaroscuro*; and *unione*[65]. Consequently, these might be the methodological expectations of the well-made painting, given this particular historical milieu.

However when attempting to formulate laws of art we soon realise that there is in fact no 'should' in art, and all attempts to identify laws in the sense of telling the artist what he ought to do or have done, fail.

Some contemporary artists, such German artist Martin Kippenberger (1953 -1997) react to the sanctity of the painted surface, and against the romantic ideal of the individual artist creating autonomous works of art. In *Heavy Burschi* (*Heavy Guy*, 1991), Kippenberger had a series of fifty-one paintings created on his instruction by helpers based on images of paintings from all his catalogues. He then had the paintings photographed and reprinted to their original size, and framed. The paintings were then destroyed and Kippenberger presented the remnants of the paintings in a skip, along with some of the framed photographs.

My paintings for this study involve responding to such explanations of the history of painting by presenting the subtle contradiction between expressed imagery and the context in which it occurs. My paintings allude, or perhaps even aim to emulate,

---

[65] Marcia Hall (1994) Sfumato and chiaroscuro together establish the professed dark manner of the Renaissance. In contrast, lively, bold colours characterize the style called unione, associated with Raphael's early works. Sfumato is the soft blending technique associated with Leonardo Da Vinci; Cangiante, or iridescence is identified with Michelangelo, instead balances different colour values by shifting hues rather than tones. An object that begins as one colour in the highlights might become another in the shadows.
is the way in which tonal shifts that would lose the intensity of colour are accomplished by changing colour, as recognised in the colourist pieces of Michelangelo; Chiaroscuro or dark/light is the dramatic way of representing form in three dimensions, accomplished notably by …and Unione is the way in which otherwise jarring colour compositions are skilfully minimised to create a single unified composition, identified in the work of Rafael . HALL, M. B. 1994. *Color and Meaning: Practice and Theory in Renaissance Painting,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press; New Ed edition

traditional demands of oil painting practice, and yet emphasis oscillates between the literal and intended meaning of the painterly statement; one thing is said and the other implied to bring out the irrationality of the visual paradox.

Esslin (1980) explains how such rebellious ploys can quickly become passé; paintings that were once challenging become established art form.[66] Yet he also argues that art embodies such a conflict of meaning because the artist intends to express a sense of wonderment, incredulity, or perhaps despair with the world.

3.4 The Tyranny of Should

Another risk with such confrontational juxtaposition is that the work becomes 'neurotic', to apply a psychoanalytic term metaphorically. In this sense, a painting may oscillate between its idealised form (the historical genius of masters) and the painting that it is.

In the context of psychoanalysis, Karen Horney (1885-1952) describes neuroticism as 'the tyranny of should'. In this sense, the 'self' is divided between idealized self and a real self. The neurotic person feels that they do not live up to the ideal self, as though they are at fault, even though the goals of the neurotic are impossibly unachievable. Thus, the neurotic is like a pendulum, oscillating between the extremes of perfection and failure[67].

Irony itself has the potential for more subtlety than this. Family resemblance, for example, (discussed later with regard to Wittgenstein) demonstrates a more sophisticated, alternative approach. In this sense, rather than 'reacting against', we may say, 'what else is going on?' Artist John Baldessari explores these themes, and his work varies between subtle irony and outright sarcasm. For example, Baldessari developed a

[66] ESSLIN, M. 1968. Naturalism in Context. *The Drama Review: TDR,* 13.
[67] KAREN, H. 1999. *Neurosis and Human Growth (International Library of Psychology),* London, Routledge; Reprint edition (July 1999). Pg.23

work of art of LED signs that display messages that could be understood and remembered by someone with a brief attention span. Therefore, the idea being that the technological age is not conducive to critical ideas that take more than 2.3 seconds to explain. [68]

John Baldessari: *What Thinks Me Now*? (1982)

I want to re-enchant, and remythologise.

I want to drill a hole deep-down in art to discover the mythic infrastructure.

(I am less interested in the form art takes than the meaning an image evokes.)

(I am interested in art as a way of knowing.)

I want to express myself in archetypal imagery.

I want to stand at the edge rather than the centre.

I want to recall what I always knew (I am interested in what thinks me.)

(I would rather discover the memory of the soul than to be correct in thought.)

I want to move away from racial amnesia.

I want to produce images that startle one into recollection.

I want to think of history so that it is not a record of events, but a method of release.

I want to see the world as something else than serial progression.

I want to know the matrix of events in history.

[68] KRISTINE STILES, P. H. S. 1995. *Theories and documents of contemporary art: a sourcebook of artists' writings,* Berkeley, University of California Press. Pg. 890

(What happens to be trivial in a fairy tale, etc. could be the lingering remnant of the memory of the soul.)

I want to engage in the spiritualization of matter, and the materialization of the spirit.

I want to think of time as synchronic.

I want to see all variants of a myth in a single imaginary space without regard to historical context.

I want to sift information from noise.

I want to avoid the tedium of sectarianism and dogma.

I want to consider language as an articulation of the limited to express the unlimited.

I want to be at home with the paradoxical, the ambiguous, and the random.

I want to eroticize time, consciousness and human culture.

I want to blur the boundaries between truth and fiction.

3.5 Intention as Explanation

The previous section suggested what the paintings might mean, based upon the artist's intention. This section now considers critically such explanation, whether, as seems apparent, the meaning of artwork is inherent in what the artist says he/she intended.

If we take the viewpoint of Stanislaw Lem's protagonist mathematician Professor Hogarth, it would be inappropriate to ask what paintings mean in any sense. *HMV*, as a model for this discussion, proposes that meaning is to a large degree determined by context, and not necessarily inherent in an art-piece itself, or in what the artist intended the artwork to mean. Meaning is then decoded from an individual

standpoint, and determined predominantly by the culture from which it emerged. From Professor Hogarth's perspective then, interpretation is simply a tool for organizing and understanding experience, or more depressingly, meaning may not be out there in the world, as we know it.

In fact, the meaning of much contemporary art is, as a matter of course, difficult to understand, vague and confusing. As Jacob Golomb reveals in Kierkegaard writings (1995), artistic communication, like authentic religious communication, should maintain a certain indirectness. Authenticity occurs in fact only when we communicate indirectly: Kierkegaard writes:

> The art of communication…becomes the art of taking away, of luring something away from someone.[69]

To what extent, therefore, can we trust what the artist says about their artwork? In considering the interpretation of artwork, aesthetic theory is familiar with the idea that artist's intention as at least partly associated. Anne Shepard (1987) says that the critic, in interpreting works of art, considers artists' intention among four kinds of consideration: other works in the same genre; other works by the same person; expectations of the audience (expected forms and conventions); and the artist's intention[70].

3.6 However, What Else is Going on Here?

In many ways the artist is the worst possible person to describe what is going. For example, egotism may delude me to describe my method of chiaroscuro is equal to Ken Currie's (2002) *Three Oncologists (Professor RJ Steele, Professor Sir Alfred Cuschieri and Professor Sir David P Lane of the Department of Surgery and Molecular Oncology,*

[69] GOLOMB, J. 1995. *In search of authenticity: from Kierkegaard to Camus,* London, Routledge. Pg. 28
[70] SHEPPARD, A. 1987. *Aesthetics: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art* Oxford, Oxford Paperbacks. Pg.94

Figure 29. Currie.K. (2002), *THREE ONCOLOGISTS (Professor RJ Steele, Professor Sir Alfred Cuschieri and Professor Sir David P Lane of the Department of Surgery and Molecular Oncology, Ninewells Hospital, Dundee),* [Oil on canvas, 195.58 x 243.84 cm] National Galleries Scotland

Ninewells Hospital, Dundee): A painting whose spectral gloominess has something of the issues of liminality and mortality that accompany cancer.

Alternatively, I may think that the imagery is as effective ironically as the paintings of Steven Campbell, for example, and I may make the error of attempting to address the imagery in his terms. Such an inflated view of the significance of my work would be a mistake, because it would blind me to the mistakes and failings of the painting, for example, that it is not in fact particularly original.

On the other hand, when I write/talk about my paintings, I might be modest to a fault, expressing that the paintings are unimportant, weak, and uninspired.

I might also come to change my opinion about what the work means. Having read a book by an obscure mythographer I may re-evaluate the archetypal significance of the sheep entirely, mid-way through the painting. Alternatively, I might suddenly remember that I associate the smell of sheep with family holidays in the Lake District when I was 6 years old, and see it in a completely different way.

I may propose the following explanations of my paintings. I may explain that in painting *Even in Gàidhlig , I Exist* my intention was to consider James Macpherson's Scottish mythic epic: *the Poems of Ossian, and the poems'* historical proximity to *The Battle of Culloden* and the *Highland Clearances*. However, I may go on to say that, I did not intend a history painting along the lines of David Wilkie's *The Chelsea Pensioners reading the Waterloo Dispatch* (1822), although Wilkie's paintings are credited with being the first historical novel – its subject being the Jacobite Rising of 1745[71].

Figure 30. Wilkie. D. (1822) ***THE CHELSEA PENSIONERS READING THE WATERLOO DISPATCH,*** [Oil on canvas, 97 x 158 cm] National Galleries Scotland

[71] DUFF, C. J. D. 2007. *Scotland, Ireland, and the Romantic Aesthetic (Bucknell Studies in Eighteenth-Century Literature and Culture),* Bucknell, Bucknell University Press. Pg. 218

Figure 31. Poussin. N. (1637-1638) ***ET IN ARCADIA EGO*** [Oil on canvas, 87 × 120 cm] Musée du Louvre

Catherine Jones (2007) argues that Wilkie was influenced by the precise pictorialism of Walter Scott's *Waverly* novels (1814), and Wilkie evokes chiaroscuro and the name of Rembrandt. His work is described as expressing an enlightenment ethos, as expressed for example in Thomas Reid's (1764) theories of perception as explored in *An Enquiry into the human mind on the principles of common sense*[72]. Wilkie seeks to show natural history through the lives of ordinary people. However, his paintings provide a sentimental romantic interpretation of relatively recent and dramatic historic events.

I may explain that this was *not* my approach to painting, but regardless it provides a fascinating counter point to the heroic symbolism of *Ossian*, whose French painterly illustrations by Gerard et al were produced during the same period. Alan Riach (2008) describes this association as follows: 'the mythology carries the heart of the event while the history holds the facts.'[73]

[72] Ibid. Pg.219
[73] ALEXANDER MOFFAT, A. R. 2008. *Arts of Resistance: Poets, Portraits and Landscapes of Modern Scotland,* Haddington, Luath Press. Pg. 75

Therefore, I would continue my explanation by saying that my intention was not a visual explanation of historical events or political problem, but a re-ordering of what we already know, and pointing at things that are of interest.

I may (pretentiously) explain that I took the title from Poussin's various versions of *Arcadian Shepherds*.

The painting shows shepherds examining a tomb with the inscription *ET in Arcadia ego* (1637–1638). This is usually interpreted as *Even in Arcadia I hold sway (exist),* as if spoken by Death[74]. These various paintings are accompanied by an interesting commentary from Poussin about the mysterious woman that replaces the image of a skull, and thus becomes the skull, and whatever it may represent.[75]

My understanding is that Poussin's painting is gently ironic, in that it means even in the idyllic landscape of classic perfectionism, death still exists. Interestingly, he painted by creating little models of people, and putting wet paper on to the to create the wrinkles and folds , which is why I began to make handmade sets for my paintings (see *Rosa Mistica*) based upon children's television programmes such as *The Magic Roundabout,* and *Noggin the Nog*.

Nonetheless, (to continue the explanation) I may say that in painting *Even in Gàidhlig, I Exist*, my intention was to state that alongside the romance of the Scottish highlands, there is still the shadow cast by recent historical events. I was, at the time, considering the interesting parallels between the displacement of people in Bosnia with the displacement of people from the Scottish Highlands and Lowlands, and destruction of highland culture, with the destruction of Muslim culture in Bosnia, as Serbian tanks

[74] PANOFSKY, E. 1998. 'Et in Arcadia Ego': Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition. *In:* PREZIOSI, D. (ed.) *The Art of Art History* Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pg. 257
[75] WISEMAN, B. 2007. *Levi-Strauss, Anthropology, and Aesthetics,* London, Cambridge University Press. Pg. 189

used Mosques and historical buildings for target practice; and Croats blew up the bridge of Mostar.

The parallels may not be identical but they are significant. Many families displaced from the West of Scotland have had varied experiences of emigration, but the west coast has failed to repopulate in anything like the original numbers, with resulting loss of traditions, and language, that James Macpherson's *Ossian* underscores if not literally, then figuratively.

In Bosnia, Serbian aggression eventually went unrewarded. Mosques have been rebuilt. Towns and villages have re-emerged, although the country still suffers the consequences of the war economically, and in terms of alcohol and drug problems. Both are particularly tragic events in their respective country's histories.

Yet why should you trust these explanations of my paintings, and why should we trust in the opinion of any artist who clearly has an interest in exaggerating the significance of the work? It would be wise, therefore, to exercise a little scepticism regarding the validity of such artist's interpretations that (at the very least) may modify over time. What I say about my work may be interesting, but I am no more authoritative than anyone else is.

Clement Greenberg (1960) claimed that artist interpretation is 'an exercise in self-definition and protection, rather than of revealing and explanation[76]', and that it is not enough to be the basis for rigorous explanation.

This notion of artistic intention subscribes to the type of overly simplified and misrepresentative dualistic explanation that this thesis is considering. Thus, in order to

[76] GREENBERG, C. 1960. The Voice of America. Available: http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/modernism.html.

understand the explanation of art, it is worth closely and critically re-considering artist's intention.

The following example may also help.

If we visit the recent *BP Portrait Award* nominees, we may marvel at the artist's ability in, for example, the post-modern pastiche 'history' painting of artist Louis Smith, entitled '*Holly*'. This painting was apparently inspired by the '*Ruggiero Rescuing Angelica*' (1819), a painting by Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres which was based in turn upon Boiardo's '*Orlando Innamorato'* (*Orlando in Love*) an epic Romantic poem, first published in 1495.

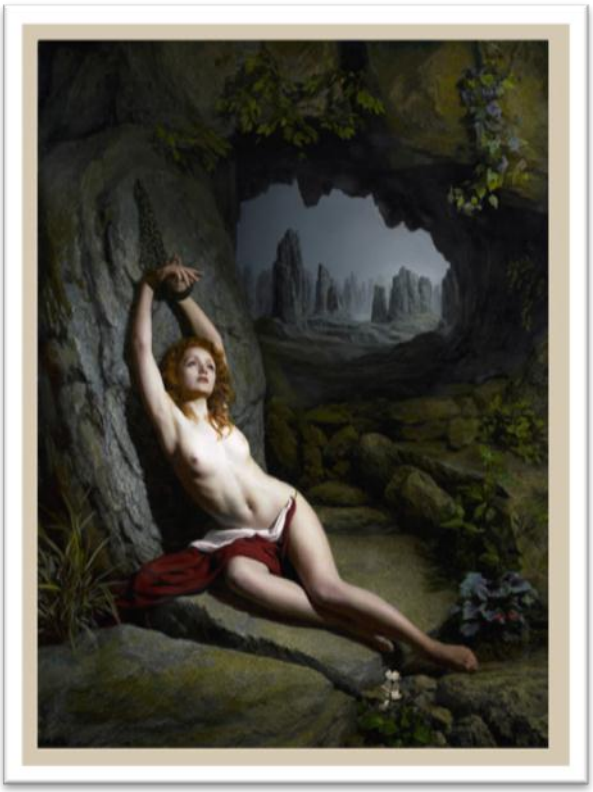

Figure 32. Smith. L. (2011), ***HOLLY,*** [Oil on canvas, 243.8 x 182.9 cm] National Portrait Gallery

Figure 33. Ingres. J. A.D (1819), ***RUGGIERO RESCUING ANGELICA,*** [Oil on canvas, 147 x 190 cm] Musée du Louvre

It seems common sense that the painting as we see it was his intention; chosen by the artist, above all other possible forms of expression. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe, as we marvel at the virtuosity of the artist, that he seems capable of reproducing

anything that comes to his mind. Here we see the manifestation of the painting as the externalisation of aesthetic ideas pre-conceived by the artist.

However, I find that within the creative process, the distinction between inner feeling and outer art object are quite difficult to identify and separate.

Admittedly, I have explained that my paintings are motivated through my attempt to communicate my inner experience of Bosnia through painting; to translate experience from sentiment to the social painting object. Moreover, in a sense, I consciously inject seemingly inert oil paint with expressive life. However, creative process may also encompass events and progressions of discovery. By which I mean the practice allows the painting to emerge from stages of transformation. There occurs the discovery of artistic effect. For no ostensible reason a painterly resolution can simply 'surface' when I become preoccupied with certain thoughts and memories.

Instinctively it seems utterly correct that I find the correct expression in the painting to represent my feeling. Having painted a toy sheep, I might think, for example, that the tone is not quite right, for example, and so the sheep does not quite capture the intended sentiment. It is correct to say that I do compare feelings of my experience with my experience of the painting. However, rather than developing only from feeling' to 'painting', the creative process can also occur in a thousand other ways. In fact, many painterly achievements are independent of artistic intention, often intentionally so.

The conceptual dualistic division between artist's inner world and external artwork creates a synthetic breach between the role of the materiality of the painting and the paintings explanation. Meaning in art is thus attached tenuously at best to the artwork. Such a division probably does exist, but can I prove it? When we look at a painting, do we look past, through and into the substance of the painting to discover the inner processes of the artist's soul? Such an approach deflects from a 'fixedness' of meaning,

because we separate an understanding of the symbolism of sheep, ruins and landscape, historically, psychologically, sociologically, from the materiality of the swirls of congealed pigment, solvent and oil.

3.7 Materiality

This problematic dualism is inverted if we explain painting solely in terms materiality. Given the resources, and the motivation, I could take infrared photographs and X-rays of the paintings of sheep. This might identify latent stages in the under drawing of the sheep. It may show how a sheep's foot moved 3 mm to the left, revealing something of my progressive decision-making progress: the partly visible hind leg of the third sheep behind the other sheep may have been an afterthought to clarify the other sheep's position. Yet, this division between the (hidden) materiality of the artwork and the inner processes of artist's mind yields a schism that allows for, if not actively encourages, imprecise understanding of the artwork. Meaning (and the work itself) may be skewed in the process of making, moving away from the original intention, especially as the immediate decisions of colour, shape, texture, and so on have a collective impact. Meaning may then also be commandeered and reapplied for a third parties (i.e. the viewers) personal agenda, at the expense of the artist's original intention. The process of such technological intervention may give the artwork a sheen of contemporary authenticity that has nothing to do with the experience of the painting itself.

In *HMV*, scientists were initially excited with the materiality of the MFTS and the physical properties of the strange 'goo' that was developed from the MFTS, which seemed to be imbued with the power to create life, and transport itself invisibly through sold materials. However, Professor Hogarth points out that the thing in itself,

with all its formal qualities, may exist independent of its meaning. Ruminating upon this difficult relationship between message and medium, Professor Hogarth writes:

> Having earlier set in motion a "biophilic emission", and afterwards desiring to enter into communication with the intelligent inhabitants of planets, they could have made use, out of simple economy, of the energy source already in operation instead of constructing special transmitters for the purpose; they could have superimposed on the neutrino stream a particular text that did not necessarily have anything to do with the stream's "life causing" character. By the same token, the meaning of a telegram that we send does not stand in any one-to-one relation with the properties of the electromagnetic waves of the wireless telegraph.

Scientists come to the amazing discovery that the information in the MFTS is capable of developing a primordial ooze with bizarre physical characteristics, such as moving in strange unpredictable ways inside a protective tank, influencing the flight patterns of blue bottle flies, or causing minute nuclear reactions remote from the substance itself. However, these discoveries revealed nothing of the meaning of the message. After initial excitement in the possible weaponry application of such characteristics, no benefit or application was to be found, and the meaning of the MFTS remained elusive.

In this sense, the materiality of the work of art exists separately from its social, historical, and cultural determinants. The peaks and troughs of the impasto of the brushstroke are independent of the artist's pre-conceived aesthetic ideas and attempts to externalise them.

In the same way, packets of instantaneous electrical data that constitute an email may have little to do with whether the contained message is a love letter, a memo from work, or the dubious notification that a long-lost relative has left you a fortune in a small African state bank.

However, photographs of the maquettes could not have been exhibited independently of the paintings, without any loss of meaning. It is not possible to interchange works of art with equivalent elements of process, and to retain meaning. Perhaps some meaning is retained, however, the voluminous physiognomies of oil painting as craft piece, or art object, for example, are representative of a network of associated ideas and cultural and historical references. These associations in themselves are quite different to a digital reproduction on paper, no matter how technologically progressive.

Clearly, there are many things happening here. This leads us naturally to reconsider the notion that the only thing happening is that the painting is a material externalisation of the artists pre-conceived aesthetic ideas. We should be suspicious of explanation that rests wholly on the apparent intention of the artist. Although it is likely that the painting Holly is to a degree, a manifestation of the artist's postmodern ideological agenda (for example), it is another thing entirely to say that the material painting in its fullness was formed in the mind of the painter, as a mental object, before the artist began painting.

This is a mistaken assumption. Artists would agree that a work of art is rarely fully formed before beginning and rarely entirely intentional. The following chapter considers several further typical approaches to understanding art.

Chapter 4: Further Ways of Explaining

4.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews some further approaches to determining meaning in art, each of which provides a framework for the understanding, but an understanding in each case that is ultimately incomplete.

Although the MFTS finally was absurdly void of meaning, the determined efforts of the scientists meant that the intercepted neutrino beam was briefly saturated with the *potential* for meaning, if only it could be decoded. Every specialist from every realm of science bestowed meaning upon it, and in doing so, finally, it had no meaning. The 'message' itself, if ever there was a message, was impenetrable. To paraphrase Lem, sometimes we face phenomena that we are unable to understand. Even if we are equipped with the most up to date of scientific apparatus and knowledge, we are incapable of resolving apparently straightforward issues such as whether phenomena are, for example, accidental or intentional. Therefore, 'the greater ocean of truth lies undiscovered before us', and as Newton once said that, with respect to nature, we are just children playing with shells on the seashore[77].

HMV presents many potential approaches to determine the meaning of MFTS. Similarly, there are innumerable ways of understanding art; therefore the meaning of an earth-borne work of art is surely understandable. However, Rudolf Wittkower (1987) identifies the painted image as an example of something that tends to support a process of suggestiveness and poly-interpretability that may resist interpretation[78].

Furthermore, James Elkins (2008) claims that there is not really a coherent structure to contemporary arts criticism generally, and that critical approaches are diverse and inconsistent:

[77] LONE, A. 2002. *Nature Exposed to Our Method of Questioning,* London, Diatrope Press. Pg.22
[78] WITTKOWER, R. 1987. *Allegory and the Migration of Symbols,* New York, Thames and Hudson. Pg.182

> It is tempting to try to escape the fog of current art criticism and run out into the clear air of certainty. Of course everyone has their own idea about where that clear air might be found…[79]

Fry, in *Anatomy of Criticism*, goes on to categorise several approaches, including a form of mythic criticism which he believed embraced much of the complexity demanded of art, this is returned to in the following chapter[80]. The variety of explanations and theories about art may lead to the suspicion that, frustratingly, meaning is entirely subjective. However, Frye argues that the complexity of art generally demands as many perspectives as possible in its interpretation. Discussing literature in this instance, he wrote:

> A critic must have more than one method in order to achieve a wide understanding of the complexity of literature.

The following sections consider briefly some of the more important recent ways in which works of art are theorized. The assumptions of modes of arts interpretation are rarely acknowledged, or recognised by the writers themselves. Therefore, this thesis suggests several such basic approaches to understanding art and identifies problematic

---

[79] NEWMAN, J. E. M. (ed.) 2008. *The State of Art Criticism,* New York & London: Routledge. Pg. 80

[80] There are as many explanations of art as there are critics and artists: Feminist, Marxist, Post-colonialist, etc., each of which is likely to augment with Freudian Psychoanalytic terminology. A feminist approach for example may consider whether a female portrayal is represented positively, Nicolai Cikovsky's psycho-sexual interpretation of 'The Gulf Stream', by Winslow Homer, in which Cikovsky provocatively put forward Homers fear of women:

> The sharks in *The Gulf Stream* …, encircling the helpless boat with sinuous seductiveness, can be read as castrating temptresses, their mouths particularly resembling the vagina dentate, the toothed sexual organ that so forcefully expressed the male fear of female aggression.

The meaning of the painting may then become, does the work represent the social and economic qualities of the world realistically?

Some critics claim that looking for meaning in art is wrong headed to begin with. Susan Sontag's (1964) takes a formalist approach, although she does not explicitly endorse formalism.

> It is the revenge of the intellect upon the world. To interpret is to impoverish, to deplete the world- in order to set up a shadow world of "meanings." It is to turn the world into this world. ("This world"! As if there were any other.)

Sontag argues that it is not necessary to replace the work of art itself with a meaning, but that it is only necessary to consider the form of the art piece itself, independent of meaning.

elements within them. These approaches are neither exclusive nor exhaustive, and many instances of explanation are mixed modes of explanation. Combinations of approaches such as formal, iconographic, and contextual analysis usually determine an understanding of artwork. This study is important because of the confusion that permeates discussions relating to the meaning of art, this confusion being in part a consequence of the deep-seated Romantic assumption in much current aesthetic thought.

Two of the more important recent ways in which work of arts are theorized are formalist criticism and reader-response theory.

4.2 Formal Approach

Firstly, formalism considers how a work of literature (read 'art') functions as an autonomous, self-referential aesthetic object. Virtually all critical approaches begin and return to the formal aspects of the artwork. It assumes that meaning derives from observable material properties of the work of art, over and above mental processes. [81] Therefore, a formalist interpretation of my later paintings might have more interest in the surface plane of the canvas, and possibly the way in which an illusion of depth and three-dimensionality has been achieved. It might be concerned with issues of colour, light, line, shape and texture. This approach leans toward the painting in itself, and potentially it may return to troublesome issues of materiality touched upon earlier.

---

[81] Maurice Denis' paintings appear to give the subject primary importance, rather than formal aspects. We as viewers may therefore infer that the meaning of the art piece is developed within the mind of the artist. In religious art, for example, the representation of the Nativity or of the Crucifixion is the picture's main rationale, whose subject matter evolved creatively in the mind of the artist to emerge as the art piece.
However, what Maurice Denis wrote in 1890 appears to contradict his artwork of painting.

> We must never forget that any painting -- before being a warhorse, a nude woman, an anecdote or whatnot -- is essentially a flat surface to be covered with colours arranged in a certain order.

Denis argued that the painting, not the subject of the art piece, gave pleasure to the mind, and was one of the first to argue that a work of art ought to find its justification in itself, the subject being only of secondary importance.

Unfortunately, assuming this perspective alone, painting is considered in a way that is a-temporal, and separated from context. [82] From the artist's perspective, an approach based upon this way of thinking may entirely avoid reference to inner processes of the artist, and artist's experience, that would require recourse to psychological theory also.

However, much current art commentary is an amalgamation of many critical approaches that include variations on formal and contextual analysis. For example, Reinaldo Laddaga's essay *Painting and Trance in Severo Sarduy's Simulacion* comprises, amongst many other elements, art historical comparisons to Andy Warhol, Gilbert and George, historical contextualisation in reference to seventeenth century Spanish mystics, and formalism in the following description of a Rothko painting for example:

> …The surfaces that present themselves on the canvas …rather than spreading out as stabile forms, do so as blurred sediments…[83]

That is not to say that there may not be benefit from a single unified explanation of the art-piece. Rather, the point is that it is necessary for a discipline to interrogate its own conceptual vocabulary of understanding. The explanation of art-pieces may often appear to be common sense, and apparently straightforward. However, as in the previous example, we appropriate and use terms from a variety of sources without considering their historical and cultural context, and without developing the implications of using such terms collectively. A discipline such as art cannot be said to be truly alive and vital if it does not challenge its failures and occasionally stimulate the things that we take for granted.

---

[82] Formalism has been heavily criticised for upholding particularly traditional agendas. By restricting interpretation to form alone, it denies the relationship between art and social context, and thus the socially critical impact of art. Rene Wellek provided a review of significant Western Art critics in *A History of Modern Criticism, 1750-1950*. In this he identifies that one of the most common recent arguments about art analysis is an objection to the idea of the art piece as autonomous(as a formalist approach would imply) the consequence of which is that formalism denies the art pieces historical context and is thus anti-historicist. Thus, such criticism is perceived as being uninterested in the human meaning, the social function and effect of literature

[83] FOGLE, D. (ed.) 2001. *Painting at the Edge of the World,* Minneapolis: Walker Art Centre. Pg. 52

4.3 Audience

In contrast to this formal approach, critics and artists have expanded the meaning of the work of art to the audience, and the ways in which the meaning of the piece is communicated. In *The Limits of Interpretation*, Umberto Eco (1994) writes that the interpretation of all discourse, within which he includes art forms, is open-ended unless we take into consideration three distinct elements. He claims that context, writer (artist), and addressee determine the 'axis of meaning'.

> The *dialectis* between sender, addressee and context is at the very core of semiosis[84].

By this he suggests that broadening understanding of the work of art in terms of local context, some critics employ aspects of reception theory to consider the relationship between work of art and audience[85]. In this respect, the very act of interpreting the artwork may influence the interpretation, and should therefore become a part of the analysis.[86] This approach considers the viewer's role in the production of meaning, and

---

[84] ECO, U. 1994. *The Limits of Interpretation,* Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press. Pg.45

[85] Again discussing the analysis of literature Robert C. Holub (1984) describes this as 'A general shift in concern from the author and the work to the text and the reader.'

[86] Wolff and Geahigan, (1997) believe that art is a process that evolves slowly over long periods of time and belongs to the very cultural fabric that makes up society. They describe art as 'transactional affairs', an engagement between spectator and art piece. GEAHIGAN, T. F. W. A. G. 1997. *Art Criticism and Education,* Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press.
The artist also belongs to this process, and intends the audience to engage with the puzzle of pursuing meaning through the analysis of art. They argue that artists as belonging to this ongoing social and historical process of creativity, aiming to engage meaningfully with their audience, and to do this they must attempt to understand what their audience expects. The artist must empathise with their anticipated audience, and assume that they are likely to have similar expectations, knowledge, and shared experience. As such, art does not exist separately as art object and artist, independent of context.
A variety of different recent theories, such as hermeneutics, viewer-response analyses, and semiotic theories of interpretation, share the idea that the meaning of an artwork is determined not only by how it was created, but also in terms of the way in which the viewer interprets it. However, viewer orientated approaches expect meaning of an art piece to be open-ended, and indeed contemporary art pieces are intentionally multi-valent and actively encourage multiple readings.
If you have ever found yourself in an art gallery wondering what a picture means- or put another way – wondering what an artist is trying to say – you have had the experience of the picture/viewer nexus, and the act of meaning making.

the extent to which the viewer creates the meaning in the work of art. Thus, in relation to my later paintings of sheep, at a very straightforward level, I may begin considering the context of the paintings in terms of their final presentation. This subtle shift in emphasis from art object to communication has enormous implications for the interpretation and understanding of art, and a whole range of new issues apply.

Consequently, for example, we might begin to consider visual meaning of my sheep paintings in a discursive social context. I may consider the role of the paintings as an impulse of discussion either academically, or instead, I could locate interpretation in a context of everyday life, such as a local social setting that is associated with the theme of the artwork.

In this sense, the artwork is given meaning as it is 'read' by a viewer. The production of meaning can also include the way in which the artist brings a response from the audience.[87] Thus, Reception theory expands the locus of meaning to the relationship between the work of art and the viewer, and the painting does not exist in isolation to its audience[88].

This focus upon the viewer's role in the creation of meaning in artwork has been collectively termed reception theory. From this perspective, *HMV* is an exercise in exploring this process of reception, as Professor Hogarth applies his convoluted process of deduction in order to understand the MFTS.

[87] Reception theory has its roots in phenomenology. The approach of considering viewer expectation became explicit in the process of works of Minimalist artists such as Carl Andre (1935-) and Dan Flavin (1933-96).
In relation to analysis of painting, Arthur C Danto proposed 'Deep Interpretation'. This encourages us to look beyond initial appearances of a formal analysis. It considers aspects that may have been out with the 'ken' of the artist. Deep Interpretation, according to David Carrier, is particularly useful in comparing two different artworks:
A function of what Arthur Danto has called deep interpretation is to show that two seemingly unconnected things, such as two paintings which are usually very different, do in fact have some real relationship.
Audiences have become increasingly sophisticated in their analysis of art pieces. Therefore, it is important from the artist's perspective in particular, to understand the process of the viewer in determining meaning interpretation. Some Minimalist works require the viewer in order to complete the work, and clearly understanding viewer interpretations and expectations played an important role in this artistic experience.

[88] This approach can be further divided into two separate methods of interpretation. Reader response, in which media text, such as a painting structures a viewer's participation in its experience through

This raises many issues, for example, about the significance of subjective and objective data, about the likelihood of misunderstanding a work of art entirely, and about the need for the artist to take account of readers changing interpretations.[89]

However, reception theory therefore denies the possibility that at some level art may mean roughly the same thing to people everywhere, and that it may have a universal cultural significance.

The difficulty with such an approach is that it passes the responsibility of determining meaning onto the viewer (or at best, into the nexus of viewer/object/maker). The locus of meaning begins to shift away from the painting itself; thus, this approach may lead down the slippery path of relativism. Possibly, therefore, we are deceiving ourselves in looking for meaning in a work of art. Following this line of thought, perhaps 'understanding' (in a determinate definition) of my paintings is ultimately and unavoidably subjective. In fact, this may be a parallel to Lem's message, as his team of Government funded elite scientists fail un-heroically to understand the MFTS.

The term "relativism" often crops up in debates over postmodernism, post-structuralism and phenomenology. Deconstruction is often termed 'relativistic' because of the way it implies that there is no true reading of a text and no text apart from its reading. The problem of negation also arises: if everyone with differing opinions is right, then no one

---

forms of symbolism. Such an approach is verging towards formalism of course, because it may lead to a close textual analysis of the art piece. This may involve discussion of how the pictorial elements determine meaning. Secondly, Reception analyses, in which processes by which an audience make sense of an art piece are considered. These are both relatively new ways of understanding viewers as visual meaning-makers, and function most successfully, not in fine art analysis, but in the advertising industry where the behaviour and awareness of the viewer are of primary importance. Such an approach therefore considers not what something means, but *how* it means.

[89] Reader response critic, Norman Holland, is fascinated by the way people relate to literature and the arts, arguing that all viewers will attach their own meaning to an art piece, independent of the artists intention, and thus any semblance of objective (i.e. non-subjective) communication fails. Writing about literature again, Norman Holland is concerned with the ways readers control the text; the major difference between Umberto Eco and Holland is that Eco is interested in the implied reader whereas Holland is interested in actual reader. Thus Holland offers a theory that explains why we very often do not all have the same response to a similar text, or painting, or MFTS for that matter. Holland claims that each reader will impose his or her 'identity theme" on the text, to a large extent recreating that text in the reader's image (e.g., the reader's mind).

is. Thus instead of saying 'all explanations are equally valid', one might just as well say 'all explanations are equally wrong'. From this perspective, art has come to denote a provisional aspect of human experience.

4.4 Too Much Meaning?

Therefore, artists face a history of art that perhaps has too much meaning. Interestingly, the dominant model of the explanation of art, as we have discussed as a residue remaining from the19thC Romantic dualistic model, encourages this proliferation of meaning in the way that it separates 'inner meaning' from artwork as object.

We are presented with the contradiction that we encounter such social, cultural, and historical atrocity that implore the consideration meaning, and yet a subjective, audience based approach to art appears to deny the very idea that collective meaning could exist. In fact, there are many difficulties associated with the idea that a work of art can mean anything at all, in light of human atrocity such as the conflict in Bosnia.

Theodor Adorno famously wrote, 'Writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.'[90] Thus, in this context, it is no longer possible to create artwork that aspires to some idea of progressive, or innate, human value. Albert Borgmann (1999) presents us with the associated problem that our information age denies our sense of meaning. However Borgmann offers the hope that art is central to overcoming this problem, by remembering through creative art making:

> We cannot redeem the holocaust, but we must remember it, and we try to do so by erecting enduring things and seeing to truthful signs[91].

[90] LACAPRA, D. 2000. *Trauma, Absence, Loss.* [Online]. Available: http://www.dactyl.org/thought/LaCapra_press_release.html.
[91] BORGMANN, A. 1999. *Holding on to Reality,* London, The University of Chicago Press. Pg.229

Paul Graves-Brown (1995) writing on the origins of material culture, claims that consumer culture has tended to endorse such an arbitrary relationship between the work of art and meaning, at the expense of the social processes, events and activities to which the work of art belongs[92]. He adds that the meaning of art can change slowly over time, and may even be difficult to pinpoint in the first place. Therefore, it is difficult to determine a fixed meaning through signification alone. If however artworks are to operate symbolically, they require a predetermined convention as to what the symbols mean, or at least suggest, and that first referent is consistent over time. Because symbolic meaning is contingent, we need a key to the system to make it work[93].

It is contestable as to whether there can be such a one-to-one correlation with all forms of signification. As we have seen, the symbol remains subject to decoding by the audience. Therefore, the image of a painted highland piper in my *Nacimiento* painting, for example, may be interpreted differently subject to, amongst other things, prior viewer experience. A highland piper may have many often-contradictory associations for the viewer.

4.5 Two Examples

Consider the case of a Highland piper, born and brought up in a Gaelic-speaking family. He is in demand as a producer and teacher, and he played and recorded for many years with Scotland's foremost traditional groups. If such a person were to look at the painting, he may bring unique cultural and musical associations to the work; his experience of the image of a highland piper may be uniquely personal, connected to local and family tradition, and his early childhood development.

---

[92] BROWN, P. M. G. 1995. Fearful Symmetry: Symbolic Aspects of Early Technologies. *World Archaeology,* 27**,** 88-99.
[93] Ibid.

Consider next the example of an English professional oil painter, who having gained his degree in Fine Art, turned professional. Art and representational painting have been his passion and career for over forty years. As well as producing works of fine art in oils, watercolours, acrylics, drawing, pastels, etchings and lino cuts, he has also endeavoured to encourage others to take up painting, either as a profession or as a pleasurable pursuit. Specifically, this painter has demonstrated his admiration of Scottish Highland culture by dedicating himself to creating his oil painting *Lone Highland Piper*. He admires the picturesque Scottish Highland towns that pride themselves on their community spirit. Consequently, the painter spent many months developing this painting, that for him celebrates one aspect of that sense of community – the Pipe Band, as enjoyed by residents and international visitors.

If he happened upon my painting and the image of the piper within a broader pluralistic collection of images, he may experience such themes of community spirit and an awareness of international appreciation. Possibly, he would also experience considerations peculiar to the perspective of the professional artist. For example, 'how will this ever sell?' In addition, 'who would buy such thing?' Furthermore, looking at the image of the piper he may shift uncomfortably as he is reminded at an almost imperceptible level, that his own Northern English community does not have an equivalent symbol, such as the piper, that embodies such a feeling of community spirit and global acceptance.

Therefore, understanding of the image of a painted highland piper (for example), is subject to the different life experiences of the viewer. This does not mean, however, that there can be no fixedness of meaning. It may be useful to consider Susanne Langer's (1957) distinction between significations that relate to presentational symbols: definable objects in the world, such as cat, mat, hat….or bat; or discursive symbols, and those that

relate to the feelings created by experience, which are less easy to represent directly through a one-to one signification. In this way, presentational symbols, such as maps for example, are perceived as complete units. Therefore, meaning can be fixed subject to certain conditions. [94] Furthermore, my paintings of sheep may provide a symbolic battleground for mutually incompatible competing signifiers. Benjamin (1989) presents Jean Francois Lyotard's explanation of such an event in discussing language games, in terms of equivocality versus univocality of the sign, in this case the sheep:

> Equivocality is thus not a state of provisional obscurity, but a state of tension between (at least) two opposing signifieds searching for their signifier. There is an inequality between signifier and signified because at a given moment there are more signifieds to be expressed than signifiers to express them. Yet they must be expressed (following the rule of competition for expression). But when they are expressed, when they have found their signifiers, a new equivocality must inhabit that expression (following the rule of the persistence of equivocality).[95]

> The speculative set-up must destroy (zerstoren) the 'identical proposition'. The word, over-loaded with opposing signifieds, explodes, but the attributive proposition cannot take them all up and express them satisfactorily. A longer discourse is necessary, a sequence of statements (just as a sequence of shots is needed to express the diverse meanings contained in the equivocality of the first).[96]

---

[94] Susanne Langer (1957) says:
The power of understanding symbols, i.e. of regarding everything about a sense-datum as irrelevant except a certain form that it embodies, is the most characteristic mental trait of mankind. It issues in an unconscious, spontaneous process of abstraction, which goes on all the time in the human mind: a process of recognizing the concept in any configuration given to experience, and forming a conception accordingly.

[95] BENJAMIN, A. (ed.) 1989. *The Lyotard Reader,* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers. Pg.267
[96] Ibid. Pg. 267

HMV establishes the absurdity of interpretation without social and historical context. The problem emerged that without any verifying external criteria, the beam was essentially meaningless. When the scientists attempted to interpret MFTS, they each had different internal motivations and frameworks by which to identify the meaning. In art, without context, such a situation leads to the potential for radically incommensurable interpretations of the work of art, where it is impossible to argue against another's interpretation. Worse still, the consequences are that this allows for the fundamentally incommensurable worldviews. *HMV* teaches us that whereas a multiplicity of interpretations of art can be asserted, interpretations remain just that, not a truth, but an interpretation.

Controversial philosopher Stanley Fish defends the contingency of such postmodern relativism. However, Fish argues that a viewer's interpretation is not completely subjective, but has a collective character.[97]

> Simply put, (reading) is an ineffably human enterprise. Stylisticians and Grammarians may explain the ways in which the writers attempt to evoke meaning in their texts, but only readerly performance ultimately shapes the nature of meaning[98].

Such an understanding accepts the inherent instability of a 'text', whether literary or painterly, and the way that meaning can change over time, but locates understanding in a broader social milieu. Fish (2002) talks about the growth and decline of interpretive

---

[97] Fish (2002) writes that literary art pieces can convey meaning in two distinct ways:
1. Rhetorically: Art pieces mirror and therefore emphasize the readers/viewers interpretation.
2. Dialectically: Conversely, art pieces challenge the reader to make his or her own meaning, or an art piece that has contradictory elements and goes against themes of unity and symmetry. Fish (2002) explores ways in which we can consider such troublesome text.

[98] DAVIS, T. F. W., KENNETH (ed.) 2002. *Formalist Criticism and Reader-Response Theory,* London: Palgrave Macmillan Pg. 110

communities, who share meaning. He argues that writers (and painters) encode meaning in the work of art, but they do so for a community of independent thinkers who themselves associate themselves with a variety of reading communities[99].

In order to avoid slipping into the abyss of relativism, Umberto Eco (1994) claims that we should be able to come to a consensus about the meaning of an artistic 'text' (such as a painting) even when we can assume that multiple interpretations are available. Therefore, the artist brings one meaning that we may recognise, and we are likely to combine this with another more personal meaning, but this is shared with the conciliation of shared collective understanding. This is important in the discussion of meaning because in broadening the discussion to issues of viewer subjectivity, we do not become lost in relativism, but rather we return to communities of understanding, through shared experience and empathy.

Applying this thought to my work then, it may be said that the images of my paintings may not have an absolute meaning, and are not eternally deferred, but rather suggest that their meaning exists in the interaction between the spectator's anticipation, based upon social resources and personal experience, and our immediate experience of the artist's painterly resolution.

We reconcile our personal experience with social understanding. Thus, if we allow it, meaning is not contingent and deferred to absurdity. Similarly, meaning is not bound to the image for eternity, but oscillates somewhere in-between.

Our capacity to explain artwork is limited by several issues. It is difficult to avoid discussing issues of form and materiality in the explanation of painting, yet an exclusively formalist approach is at the expense of a broader historical and cultural framework of understanding. However, an approach based upon the viewer risks

[99] Ibid. Pg.110

slipping into relativism. The following historical approach attempts to place art more firmly in context.

4.6 Paintings as Cultural Fossils

The *New Historicism* that began in the 1980's intends to provide understanding into the context and resources audiences used in order to make sense of artwork. *New Historicism* treats the text as a material product of specific social conditions. It involves recognising the historical implications for minority groups in particular. Thus, Greenblatt (2000) argues that *New Historicism* involves illuminating the contradictions and incongruences of any historical time[100]. Disclosing and analysing these tensions also traces the paths along which representational energies and historical motivations flow.[101]

Greenblatt (2000) argues that a myriad of contextualizing elements create the cultural texts and artefacts of any given age. Rather than remaining in the background of cultural interpretation, such elements affect both the artist and his/her work of art. As Michael Baxandall says in *Painting and Experience*, this approach intends to show how the style of paintings is a proper material of social history.

> Fifteenth century modes of costing manufactures, and fifteenth-century differential payments of masters, and journeymen, are both deeply involved in the style of the paintings as we see them now: paintings are among other things fossils of economic life.[102]

However, *New Historicism's* focus on historical context, as might be expected, is criticised for discussing everything but the work.

---

[100] GREENBLATT, C. G. S. 2000. *Practicing New Historicism,* Chicago, The University of Chicago Press. Pg. 85

[101] BAXANDALL, M. 1988. *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style,* Oxford, Oxford University Press.Pg.85

[102] Ibid.Pg. 2

Less obviously, Harold Bloom says that *New Historicism* is in fact not so new, but a poor continuation of previous scholarly efforts.[103] A rigorous examination of meaning in artwork has always, to one degree or another, involved reference to historical and cultural context. However, despite these concerns, the importance of context concerning the analysis of painting has become apparent because without such context we simply accept the dominant mode of understanding.

In *HMV*, it becomes clear that the interpretation of the mysterious MFTS is incapable of providing the means to escape the pull of dominant military concerns typical of cold war paranoia. Hogarth despairs that in the past, when we revealed the secrets of the atom, we used the knowledge, Prometheus-like to develop the fission bomb as a tool of destruction, before all other applications.

> It appeared that in the opinion of the Pentagon, or at least of that section of the Pentagon which had taken the Project under its wing, the MFTS was a kind of blueprint for a super bomb or some other ultimate weapon - a peculiar idea, at first glance, and saying more about the general political atmosphere than about galactic civilizations. [104]

In painting, a dominant mode of understanding may include the modernist canon of masterpieces. A closer consideration of the social and historical context however may suggest a plurality of such canons that do not maintain a western male superiority in the art world. Parsons and Blocker claim that the context of artworks is typically institutions such as the gallery, the classroom, and the lecture theatre[105]. However, the context of the artwork should be considered more expansively, as belonging to all

[104] LEM, S. 1983. *His Master's Voice,* New York, Northwestern University Press. Pg.56
[104] LEM, S. 1983. *His Master's Voice,* New York, Northwestern University Press. Pg.56
[105] MICHAEL J. PARSONS, H. G. B. 1993. *Aesthetics and education,* Champaign, Illinois, University of Illinois Press Pg. 56

aspects of society and not exclusively as an art object in itself. Thus, from this point of view, a broader understanding of my paintings may require consideration of not only art history, or formalist aesthetics, but importantly also, the artworks economic, political, religious and class based significance.

Art educationalist James Elkins (2003) argues that practitioners and providers of visual art tend to disregard any such an historical approach, because they consider it to be out of touch with current issues[106] . Elkins (2001) argues that a consequence of such detachment from historicism is that we diminish focussed enquiry of meaning in art.[107] Yet, as Parsons and Blocker have suggested, a consideration of cultural and historical context is precisely what is required in order to address current social issues. [108]

New Historicism emerged largely in reaction to a-historical approaches of the 1960's, such as conventional historical-biographical criticism, in which literature understood as an accurate reflection of the historical world in which it was produced. With such approaches, history was viewed as stable, linear, and a narrative of fact.

By way of contrast, *New Historicism* (Stephen Greenblatt was an important early writer) draws upon critical writers such as Michel Foucault and Andres Malraux. Foucault's intertextuality focuses on issues of power in society, and he argues that history should be considered figuratively as genealogy, in as much as the full variety of conflicting influences should be considered in its interpretation. Eco (1989), claims that the

---

[106] ELKINS, J. 2003. *Visual Studies A Sceptical Introduction,* New York, Routledge. Pg.23 In fact, Elkins claims that those teaching studio art in art schools are detached from the history of art education. He says that art schools now tend to reject structured teaching in favour of a practice that owes much to the Romantic rebellion of the 1800's, a consequence of valuing individual subjectivity and creativity. Elkins goes on to say that, many art schools have gone further and are likely to put ideology and politics before an understanding of media. Therefore, Art education has become something entirely divorced from the traditions of art:
…what is done is either the determined opposite of the customs and habits of the older academies, or else the lingering, nearly inaudible echo of the Bauhaus.

[107] ELKINS, J. 2001. *Why Art Cannot Be Taught: A Handbook For Art Students,* Chicago, The University of Illinois Press. Pg.28

approach of much contemporary artwork is in fact defined precisely in terms of such historical context, and that the ideas that motivate today's artists, and much contemporary (postmodern) art, is understood in terms of historical justification.

Artists have achieved critical success from parodying the work of old masters and playfully obfuscating connotation. For example, American painter Russell Conner hangs his work (figuratively) on his father's comment that:

> It's OK to be an artist, if you can paint like Rembrandt[109].

Conner wittily interweaves assorted pictorial narratives from recognizable old masters paintings. However, his (ironic) proposal that repeating the styles of the past is the straightforward solution to producing successful art does not convince Arthur C. Danto (1997) who states that all art is of its time; it is culturally and historically specific, and we must look to see what else Rembrandt has to offer other than simply style[110].

Figure 34. Conner. R. (1986),*THE SPANISH VISITORS*, [Oil on canvas, 167.6 x 127 cm] Artist's Collection

[109] CONNER, R. 2010. *Russellconner.com* [Online].
[110] DANTO, A. C. 1997. *After The End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* Princeton, Princeton Paperbacks. Pg.209

Figure 35. Manet. E. (1868-1869), ***THE BALCONY,*** [Oil on canvas, 170 x 124.5 cm] Musee d'Orsay

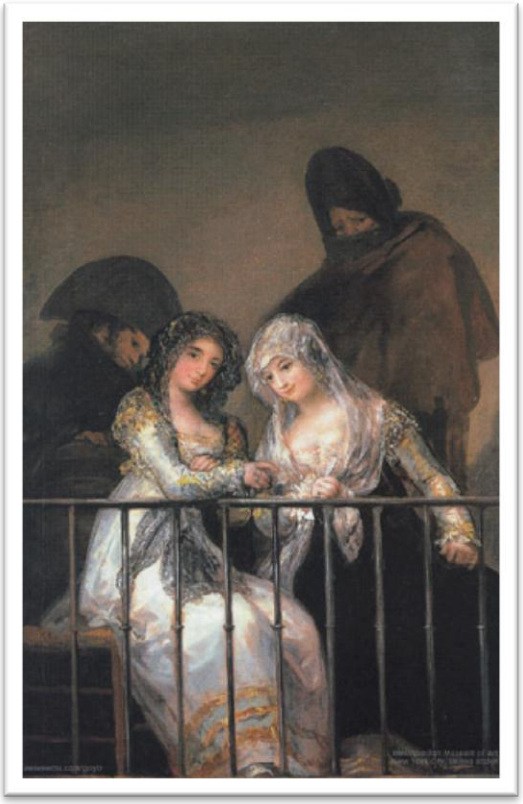

Figure 36. Goya. L. F. J (1810 – 1812), ***MAJAS ON A BALCONY*** **(*version 2),*** [Oil on canvas, 194.8 x 125.7cm] Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City

Connor's painting (top) is in fact a more playful response to issues of historical context, located alongside two famous scenes, Goya's *'Majas on a Balcony'*, with two women leaning on a railing and two mysterious men behind. Manet has painted his own *'The Balcony'* almost sixty years later. Russell replaced three background figures in Manet's painting.

Yet historian and art critic Hal Foster (1996) presents a critical framework to describe art's apparent break with history, suggested by this comparison between Goya, Manet and Russell. Therefore, this type of parody is emblematic of something more significant in contemporary painting. Foster suggests that Western Art after the 1960's became the battleground of two distinct approaches to art. On the one hand, the romantic insistence that the artist as Hero had returned, versus what he describes as the 'Post-structuralist pastiche of the historicity of art'.[111] He argues that these two approaches are linked by the reduction of art explanation to issues of economy, in particular a

> dynamic of reification and fragmentation. [112]

However, Foster maintains that art works preserve issues of social tension within historicity, and this is what the function of art interpretation should hope to identify. That art and theory manifest social contradictions, and that art possess a historicity that it is one task of criticism to apprehend.[113]

---

[111] FOSTER, H. 1996. *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century,* London, The MIT Press. Pg. 72
[112] Ibid. Pg.72
[113] Ibid.

Art historian David Carrier considers the impact on contemporary artists by their historical antecedents. For example, Carrier investigates the impact that the work of Andrea del Sarto (1486 – 1531) an Italian painter from Florence, has had upon American painter David Reed, and reviews various similarities and differences between the two artists. Besides being a painter, Reed also produces work as an installation sculptor and a video artist.

Both Reed and Del Sarto have a shared devotion to an intensity of technical perfection in representation. According to the Uffizi Gallery website, Del Sarto was highly regarded by his contemporaries as an artist *senza errori* (i.e., without flaw). Similarly, Georgio Vasari proposes in *Lives of the Artists* that Del Sarto's work was indeed precise to a fault:

> His figures, however, for all their simplicity and purity, are well conceived, free from errors, and absolutely perfect in every respect[114].

Del Sarto was criticised by Georgio Vasari for focussing upon technical accuracy at the expense of verve and emotion. In the same way, David Reed's work is characterised by technical imitation of the painterly brushstroke, but similarly devoid of passion, and at huge scales, producing a mechanistic equivalent to abstract expressionism.

The critical analysis provided by Carrier places side by side the work of contemporary artists with painters from the past. In doing so, he evokes Hal Foster's aforementioned apparent postmodern break in recent Western cultural progression, described by Arthur C. Danto as *The End of Art*[115]. Carrier claims that this rupture is typically characterised in art by the inability of art to progress beyond stylistic devices such as the glib parody

---

[114] GIORGIO VASARI, G. B. 1987. *The Lives of the Artists: a selection (Volume II),* London, Penguin Group. Pg. 129

[115] DANTO, A. C. 1997. *After The End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* Princeton, Princeton Paperbacks.

of old master tradition. Carrier argues that there is a kind of laziness on the part of the artist that accepts this 'postmodern endgame' of pastiche and appropriation in lieu of the inclusion of original material. He states:

> As I have indicated elsewhere, I do not and cannot accept this vision of contemporary art, whose seeming bleakness and would-be political radicality hides, in truth, a certain complacency[116].

Yet, although David Carrier proposes that these issues are exactly the sort of thing that Reed addresses in his painting practice, is this the case? Although Reed researches late Renaissance and Baroque painters to a degree that goes deeper than mere appropriation, do they offer any lessons from the past other than in terms of manner. There are few critics willing to advise how a painter may learn from historic artwork.

Are such comparisons simply mannerisms devoid of historical and cultural context? Carrier asserts that such a comparison is useful because it allows us to understand better both historical situations. Such comparisons may be helpful because what we call art changes over time.

4.7 Bricolage and *Ossian*

From the perspective of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1962), fragments of history can be placed together like a mosaic. Claude Lévi-Strauss used the term *bricolage* in his book *The Savage Mind* (1962). The *bricoleur* was someone in the manner of handyman, capable of fixing and mending, who used the materials and tools at hand to solve problems. The problems to be solved by the contemporary artist may be, for example, precisely in representing an art other than the canons of elite male orientated western society. Not therefore being masterful at painting, for example, but accepting his (or her) lot, and

[116] ALLEN, S. B. W. (ed.) 1991. *Interpreting Contemporary Art,* London: Reaktion Books. Pg. 68

working within the limitations of society, willing to take on the task at hand. The bricoleur has a faculty for life that is missed by the virtuoso, and is likely to defy the expectations of elitism and canon.

Bricolage describes spontaneity and responsiveness to the situation at hand. The term allows for an inclusion of patterns of mythological thought: a product of human imagination, and based upon personal experience. Therefore, the symbolism of mythological thinking is created from pre-existing things within the imaginer's mind[117].

However, from the standpoint of Lévi-Strauss (1962), fragments of history can also be synthesised for political ends, becoming a means rather than an end. A contemporary example of such historical appropriation, Noel Malcolm (1994) explains how Milošević recycled fragments of history for his own political ends in Bosnia. On 28th June 1989, hundreds of thousands of Serbs gathered at a historic battlefield site of Gazimetzan, on the outskirts of Pristina, Kosovo, to celebrate the Battle of Kosovo.

> 'After six centuries', Milošević told the crowd, 'we are again engaged in battles and quarrels. They are not armed battles, but this cannot be excluded yet.' The crowd roared with approval.[118]

His pictorial arguments assume an authority, by unstated reference back to their historical source in association with the Battle of Kosovo.

Ironically, such artists that consider contemporary historicist approaches to art employ both respectful acknowledgement for traditional artwork, and simultaneously manifest a deep suspicion for historical explanation. Perhaps however, other than just historical explanation, something more strange and mythical happens here.

---

[117] PENNER, H. 1998. *Teaching Lévi-Strauss,* Illinois, Oxford University Press. Pg.155
[118] MALCOLM, N. 1994. *Bosnia: A Short History,* London, MacmillanPublishers Ltd. Pg. 213

Howard Gaskill (2004) provides another example of the way in which art employs fragments from the past. He suggests that 18th Century English literary scholars questioned the authenticity of James Macpherson's rendition of *Ossian* as an ancient third century epic. They were sceptical in part because of suspicions concerning his management of historical fragments.[119] This was the case despite the fact that, as Gaskill says, many admirers were aware of Macpherson's creative approach[120]. In one sense, *Ossian* is best understood in terms of the historical context: as Macpherson's response to the post-Culloden trashing of Highland culture. In another sense, cultural artefacts such as *Ossian* are likely to lose 'all depth'[121] when understood and explained in historical, scientific, or psychoanalytic terms. These terms of reference as we understand them today are simply too constrained by our current expectations and disciplinary boundaries in contemporary understanding. Furthermore, there is perhaps a genuine inability to make an operative and consistent translation into English of the original spoken Gaelic, especially as it was construed back in time to *Ossian's* world.

Writing on myth and ritual, Wittgenstein, argues that there is such a complexity that cannot be reduced to explanation. Wittgenstein (1979) considers convictions that motivate the Celtic Beltane festival[122]. He claimed that such events embodied a complexity and richness that allow it to withstand history.[123]

> Perhaps it (Beltane) is only performed by children now, who have contests in baking cakes and decorating them with knobs. So that the depth lies solely in the thought of that ancestry. Yet this ancestry may be very uncertain and one feels

[119] GASKILL, H. 2004. Introduction: Genuine poetry...like gold'. *In:* GASKILL, H. (ed.) *The Reception of Ossian in Europe.* London: Continuum. Pg. 2
[120] Ibid. Pg.2
[121] ZENGOTITA, T. D. 1989 On Wittgenstein's Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough. *Cultural Anthropology,* Vol. 4, . Pg. 394
[122] RHEES, R. (ed.) 1979. *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough,* Chippenham and Eastbourne: The Byrnmill Press Ltd.
[123] Ibid. Pg. 16e

> like saying: "Why make what is so uncertain into something to worry about? (like a backwards-looking Kluge Else). But worries of that kind are not involved here.[124]

Wittgenstein therefore encourages us to question—in a manner that may be extended to this discussion of *Ossian*--whether an explanation (of *Ossian*) is entirely necessary in experiencing its inherent strangeness. Here Wittgenstein's writing style mimics such perplexity of experience that he identifies with myth:

> We might put it this way: "Anyone who wanted to impress us with the story of the Beltane festival would not need to explain the hypothesis of its origin anyway; he would only have to lay before us the material (which leads to this hypothesis) and say nothing more." Here one may be inclined to say: "Of course, because the listener or reader will draw the conclusion himself!" But must he draw the conclusion explicitly? i.e., draw it at all? And what sort of conclusion is it? That this or that is *probable*? And if he can draw the conclusion himself, how should the conclusion make an impression on him? What makes the impression must surely be something *he* has not done…[125]

Perhaps then, Macpherson's translations of the fragments of Ossianic poetry into English, and all subsequent languages around the world, lose something unusual and exceptional in the idea of the myth itself. Do *Ossian's* mythic 'doomy, heroic epics: dying warriors, keening women, the wind over the hills'[126] manifest a unique oddness when spoken and understood in Scots Gaelic? There is no doubt that historical critical debate of the authenticity Macpherson's *Ossianic* myth are interesting, particularly

---

[124] Ibid. Pg. 16e
[125] Ibid. Pg. 17e
[126] GASKILL, H. 2004. Introduction: Genuine poetry...like gold'. *In:* GASKILL, H. (ed.) *The Reception of Ossian in Europe.* London: Continuum. Pg. 1

given recent postmodern debate of 'the death of the author' (Barthes, 1968) [127], but as Wittgenstein shows us, such historical explanation only begins to resemble our idea of *Ossian* in all its mythic strangeness. The strangeness itself is compelling, and the attempt to translate strangeness is doomed to failure.

Reconsiderations of *Ossianic* myth, unknowably distorted in the translations of Macpherson, typically attempt to apply a considered historical mode of interpretation that considers the authenticity of Macpherson's approach. This might give us the advantage of reading through the periods of both the third century and the 18th century as best we can with historical evidence, and perhaps even deviate into the anecdotal evidence of the period.

However, this is only one way to appreciate the myths of *Ossian*. In the 21st century, we have many other modes of interpretation, which are outlined above, to augment our understanding of this epic national myth. It is worth noting, that the value of mythic form is in part its resistance to 'explanation', as I have also discussed above. This leaves us with a model of complex, variable, multiple, and in part unknowable material for our consideration. I believe that we can apply this analogy to the understanding of my paintings also, in the sense that historical, scientific, and psychological explanations of the paintings and the creative process are other than the way that we instinctively know painting. Alternatively, to reframe this idea, my paintings are not providing historical explanations of a particular subject, but are creatively reorganising, synthesising and representing those things that we already knew to be the case.

Furthermore, if we consider myth and art from an anthropological perspective, we begin to recognise the diversity in approaches to art creation and understanding.

[127] ALLEN, G. 2003. *Roland Barthes (Routledge Critical Thinkers),* London, Routledge. Pg. 73

For example, André Malraux (1901-1976) in *The Voices of Silence* (1978) doubts the Enlightenment aesthetics tradition and views art as something other than in aesthetic terms. For example, Malraux claimed that pre-industrial art was distinct from contemporary art primarily because it was generally religious in nature[128]. He disputes that there has been consistency to the meaning of the term art across history, and that the notion of art itself is one that is historically and culturally specific:

> …For an Asiatic, and especially the man of the Far East, artistic contemplation and the picture gallery are incompatible. In China, the full enjoyment of works of art necessarily involved ownership, except where religious art was concerned; above all it demanded their isolation. A painting was not exhibited, but unfurled before an art lover in a fitting state of grace; its function was to deepen and enhance his communion with the universe. The practice of pitting works of art against each other, an intellectual activity, is at the opposite pole from the mood of relaxation which alone makes contemplation possible. To the Asiatic's thinking, an art collection (except for educational purposes) is as preposterous as would be a concert in which one listened to a programme of ill-assorted pieces following in unbroken succession.[129]

He wrote that it is true that the impulse to paint, sculpt and be creative has been a universal part of human life from the earliest times. However, the current intellectual tradition of art does not resemble the way in which we would have considered representations of ideal beauty, or gods, and ancestor spirits in the past, for example.

[128] For example, Malraux claims that post-Renaissance Europe saw a decline in the sacred element in European painting. Other elements replaced the sacred, such as a human ideal of beauty. In addition, towards the end of the nineteenth century, there was a relatively sudden change over a few short decades to include works from cultures from around the globe, and from cultures distant in time. The consequence being the possibility that 'art' may denote an aspect of human experience that is contingent - something no more firmly anchored than the sacred.

[129] MALRAUX, A. 1978. *Voices of Silence: Man and His Art,* New York, Princeton Univ Pr. Pg.14

Our understanding of art, he claims, is now centred on the art gallery, or museum, or in a more contemporary setting, the webpage. This in turn severs the work of art from original social and cultural context. Art, as we now know it is not a permanent category of human experience, as traditionally assumed in Western aesthetics, but something inherently transient. Yet from this anthropological perspective, we begin to recognise that the inherently transient contemporary western understanding of art is only one of many diverse ways of understanding art.

Joseph Campbell (1949) in studying global myth also demonstrates that art in a mythic context can be understood in many ways other than the typically western aesthetic model, and it is to this mythic approach to art explanation that this thesis now turns.

Chapter 5: Mythic Explanation

5.1 Introduction

This chapter considers critically the way in which aspects of myth explain art, beginning by delineating what this thesis means by the nebulous term myth.

The original nature of Greek myth is difficult to identify. Kershaw (2007) writes that many tales were recorded late in their historical development, and it is therefore difficult to recognise the origin and purpose of myth.

A myth may involve gods or goddesses, monsters, the supernatural, heroic humans, animals, and nature, although it does not necessarily have to include any of these things. Robert Segal (2004) proposes that whatever else a myth may be, it is essentially a story[130]. Discussing Greek myth, RGA Buxton (2004) agrees that, 'A myth is a socially powerful traditional story'[131]. Walter Burkert (2007) also proposes that 'Myth is a traditional tale with secondary, partial reference to something of collective importance'[132].

5.2 Myth and Painting

Myth has long since proved a valuable ally to the oil painter. Tumpel (2006), writing about Rembrandt's use of myth, tells us that more than half of all the ancient histories represented by the Baroque artists (from the late 16th century to the early 18th century) show scenes from Greek and Roman mythology that are to be found in Ovid's stories of

[130] SEGAL, R. A. 2004. *Myth, a very short introduction,* Oxford, Oxford University Press.Pg. 4
[131] BUXTON, R. 2004. *The Complete World of Greek Mythology,* London, Thames and Hudson Pg. 24
[132] KERSHAW, S. 2007. *A Brief Guide to the Greek Myths: gods, monsters, and the heroes of storytelling* London, Constable and Robinson. Pg. 13

myth[133]. Leon Battista Alberti (1435) describes the familiarity of Ovid to artists of the time:

> …I used to tell my friends that the inventor of painting, according to the poets, was Narcissus, who was turned into a flower, for, as painting is the flower of all the arts, so the tale of Narcissus fits our purpose perfectly. What is painting but the act of embracing by means of art the surface of the pool.[134]

Ovid's mythic tales represented a potent tool for early painters, and were instrumental in allowing artists to tell the story in new and powerful ways[135].

Imaginative thought processes, as opposed to fantasy, identify myth according to Frankfort, Frankfort, Wilson and Jacobsen (1963), based upon their observations of the myths of two of the oldest civilizations, Egypt and Mesopotamia, they claim:

> The thought of the ancient Near East appears wrapped in the imagination. We consider it tainted with fantasy. But the ancients would not have admitted that anything could be abstracted from the concrete imaginative forms which they left us[136] .

Northrop Frye (1957) proposes a continuum in art that runs between Realism (perhaps including photorealism but certainly all mimesis in painting) and myth as total metaphor, in which anything can mean anything else. For Frye, myth is an extreme of literary design:

---

[133] TÜMPEL, C. 2006. *Rembrandt: Images and Metaphors,* London, Haus Publishing Limited. Pg. 147

[134] ALBERTI, L. B. 1435 Reprint edition 2005. *On Painting,* London, Penguin Classics;. Pg.61

[135] Karel van Mander (1548 –1606) Dutch biographer of Netherlandish artists travelled in Italy and was inspired by Giorgio Vasari's translation of *Metamorphoses*. Van Mander dedicated a large part of his book about painting "Schilder-boeck" ('Painter book' 1604) to Ovid.

[136] JACOBSEN, H. F. M. H. A. F. J. A. W. T. 1963. *Before Philosophy: The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man,* Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Penguin Books Ltd. Pg.11

> A world of total metaphor in which everything is potentially identical with everything else, as though it were all inside a single body [137].

This fluidity of fixedness of meaning allows myth to exist across several art forms. Kershaw (2007) proposes that the potency of myth lies in this characteristic of myth: as a story within text, and/or oral form, and/or in visual art. Thus, myth is not restricted to a single art form, but is able to traverse different creative modes. Tumpel (2006), writing about Rembrandt, attributes the success of myth to its potential for proliferation as illustrated by woodcut prints during which time in the 16th century ancient literary mythic works were in the process of being translated into many languages and printed by movable type printing presses.

However, as Tumpel goes on to explain, it was not only the texts, but the illustrations themselves that were important to the artists. In them Rembrandt could see how the stories had been interpreted by artists, translated from text to image. In this way, the images had managed to achieve autonomy from the authority of the text, and artists were free to embellish motifs that were not present in the original text. It was evident that artists invented motifs that were later copied by other artists in a growing turn toward the accessible visual narrative.

[137] FRYE, N. 1971. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essay,* Princeton, Princeton University Press. Pg. 136

5.3 Post War Myth

Painters have been exploring such mythic themes well into the 20th Century. The characteristics of symbolic metaphor, analogy and pervasiveness are common to much contemporary Pop Surreal work, for example. Painted imagery and symbolism repeats across collectable vinyl figures, toys, games, and books. For example, although only occasionally demonstrating mythic narratives explicitly, such as his illustration of the Heracles story, contemporary artist Gary Baseman proposes just such a pervasive art

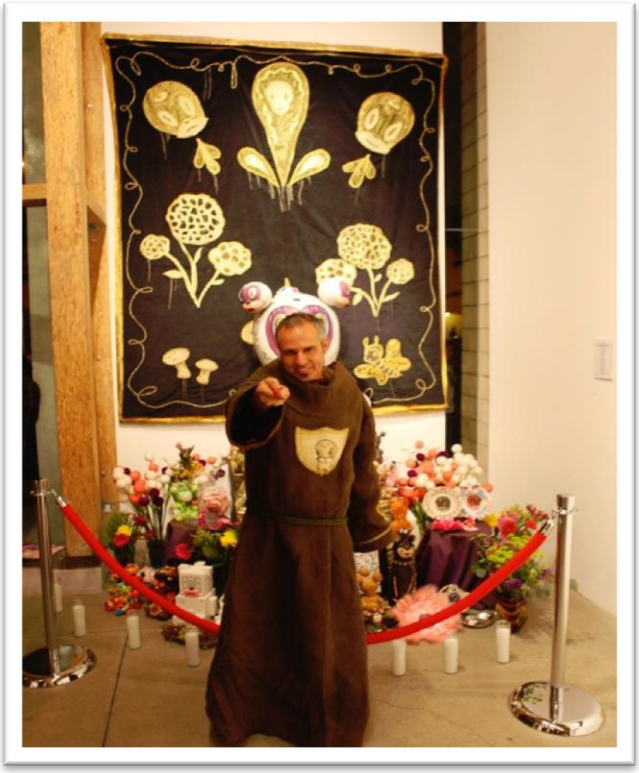

Figure 37. Baseman. G. (2009*), "La Noche de la Fusion" Exhibition,* [various media] Corey Helford Gallery, Los Angeles

movement that crosses mediums, not simply restricted to painting. Baseman's work presents a contrast between grotesque comedies, appropriated pop imagery, and mythic themes.

Post war Surrealist painting is perhaps the most explicit modern exponent of myth. Gershman (1963), however, writes that Surrealist painting originating in the 1920's, although myth-orientated, is in fact directed to the creation of new myths, and liberation from the past. In doing so, it rejected the sentimentality of the Romantics in favour of techniques of experimentation and investigation.[138] Pop-Surrealists on the other hand replicate the manner of European surrealism experiment and exploration. [139]However, Surrealism's original manifesto footnote has been replaced by individualistic ironic distance and a dominant commercial sensibility[140]. Although the manner of Surrealism is often associated with odd juxtaposition alone, Gershman (1963) writes that that Surrealism looked to myth in order to put love in its rightful place at the centre of society, as the source of inspiration for all human activity. Thus Surrealism, unlike Pop Surrealism, is founded on a deeper social agenda:

> 'The imagination which knows no limits', (Andre Breton, *Manifeste de Surrealisme*, 1924), was the peculiarly human attribute which would enable them to overthrow, or at least shake, the oppressive and smug regime on which their society rested[141].

Doss (2006) writes that many types of post-war artists began to embrace the universalising characteristics of myth. Mark Rothko called his fellow American Abstract Expressionists, 'a small band of myth-makers'[142]:

---

[138] GERSHMAN, H. S. 1963. Surrealism: Myth and Reality. *In:* SLOTE, N. F. B. (ed.) *Myth and Symbol: Critical Approaches and Applications.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. Pg. 51

[139] Such as Jacek Yerka, Joe Coleman, Jennybird Alcantara and Christopher Ulrich, Karl Persson, Chris Mars, Mark Ryden, Ivan Titor, Lori Early, Dino Vallis, Tristan Schane, Mike Worrall, Tino Rodriguez, Pavel Zacek, and many more besides

[140] GERSHMAN, H. S. 1963. Surrealism: Myth and Reality. *In:* SLOTE, N. F. B. (ed.) *Myth and Symbol: Critical Approaches and Applications.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. Pg. 152

[141] Ibid. Pg.52

[142] DOSS, E. 2006. The Visual arts in post 1945 - America. *In:* JEAN-CHRISTOPHE AGNEW, R. R. (ed.) *A Companion to Post-1945 America.* New York: Wiley-Blackwell.Pg.117

> Many (post-war artists) valorized the myths and symbols of diverse premodern cultures, feeling they best embodied a universal language that expressed essential truths about the human condition.[143]

5.4 Joseph Campbell's Universalizing Myth

Writers of comparative mythology have developed the idea that there may be shared form to all myths, of deep hidden structure. The myth of one culture or period is not dominant over another, but all myths have importance. In particular, the hero myth has been identified by several writers as having broadly similar underlying structure across various cultures. Such unifying aspects of myth have been considered by mythographers such as Joseph Campbell, Carl Jung, and Mercia Eliade.

Some contemporary scholars are critical of such broad statements about myths. However, comparative approaches to mythology were popular among eighteenth- and nineteenth-century academics, and Otto Rank (1914), influenced by Sigmund Freud, argued that the stories of heroes' births have a common structure:

> Many investigators have long been impressed with this fact, and one of the chief problems of mythological research still consists in the elucidation of the reason for the extensive analogies in the fundamental outlines of mythological tales, which are rendered still more puzzling by the unanimity in certain details and their reappearance in most of the mythical groupings.[144]
>
> Similar birth legends to those of Jesus have also been transmitted of other founders of religions, such as Zoroaster…[145]

---

[143] Ibid. Pg. 117

[144] RANK, O. 2008. *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero: A Psychological Interpretation of Mythology* Charleston, South Carolina, Forgotten Books. Pg. 1

[145] Ibid. Pg. 57

> …Related themes are also encountered in the history of Buddha (sixth century before Christ), such as the long sterility of the parents, the dream, the birth of the boy under the open sky…[146]

More recently, Joseph Campbell (1948), has also proposed that hero stories share a common structure. Joseph Campbell (1904-1987) presented just such a way to understand the underlying unity of human culture, and offered lengthy and detailed anecdotal evidence to support this belief. Campbell (1948) proposed the stages that the hero goes through as part of a mythic journey in which he overcomes challenges, and experiences initiation. He describes this as a symbolic rather than literal process, explicated through myth. Thus, Campbell (1948) identifies the symbolic representation of bravado as a universalizing theme and defining narrative of a young man's life.

In recent popular culture American six-time Oscar winner *The Hurt Locker* (2010), is just such a story based upon the premise that, for some young men, war is exciting and addictive. Thus, Guy Westwell (2009) wrote:

> This unapologetic celebration of a testosterone-fuelled lust for war may gall. Yet there is something original and distinctive about the film's willingness to admit that for some men (and many moviegoers) war carries an intrinsic dramatic charge.[147]

The Hurt Locker was not only a mix of drama and documentary, and more than the representation of the emotional response of young male soldiers involved in modern warfare. The film is also defined in terms of the underlying hero myth structure, a tale of confronting adversaries, and themes of leaving and return to the exotic supernatural worlds of Gods, Monsters, Heroes, and trials of Iraq.

---

[146] Ibid. Pg.106

[147] WESTWELL, G. 2009. Film review: The Hurt Locker. *Sight and Sound.*

Far from accepting all of Campbell's theories of myth, Robert Segal (1990) criticises Campbell for his apparent turn away from his early approach to integrate the individual ego into a cosmic whole, which had been inspired by non-heroic eastern concerns.

> An elitist philosophy of all-American individualism has replaced the earlier "radical form of radical monism" of Eastern inspiration in Campbell's affections, and indeed "it is hard to reconcile this claim with his heretofore relentless praise of the East" [148]

In acknowledging these criticisms, Walker (1949) suggests that we return to the most important inspiration for Campbell's initial work, the doctrine of the harmony of religions advocated by a late 19th-century Hindu mystic in *The Gospel of Ramakrishna*. It was in translations of these Bengali writings that Campbell found the concept for his early approaches to mythology as a single universalising belief system. Campbell helped Swami Nikhilananda with the original English translation of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.[149]

Campbell was also heavily influenced by Carl Jung, from whom he recognised that

> …all myths and epics are linked in the human psyche, and that they are cultural manifestations of the universal need to explain social, cosmological, and spiritual realities.[150]

Joseph Campbell is often described as a Jungian; however, he did not take a psychoanalytic approach, or refer to Jung's notion of a collective unconscious. However, Campbell does refer to Jung frequently, and agrees that myths express a higher form of human understanding.

---

[148] WALKER, S. F. 1990. (Review) Joseph Campbell: An Introduction by Robert A. Segal. *The Journal of American Folklore,* 103**,** 372-374.Pg. 372

[149] CAMPBELL, J. 1949. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,* New York, Pantheon Books. Pg.415

[150] Ibid. Pg.415

Thus, Campbell shared Jung's belief in an ultimate unity of all existence. Jung proposed that the comparison of myths from different cultures reveals universal archetypes: the images, symbols and structures that reoccur throughout time and culture, potentially connect people of different times and places. Importantly, Jung proposed that archetypes are not simply forms with which we can passively observe reality, but are in fact the tools with which the mind begins to apprehend and imaginatively create the world in which we live.[151] Regarding the interpretation of art, Jung (2003) explained that artists such as Dante and Wagner, disguised 'difficult material' such as dramatic and emotional experiences that we would otherwise turn away from because of our unease or embarrassment, and the artist's well of unconscious hidden knowledge, as historical or mythical events. Jung asserted that if we reduce the artistic vision to personal experience, we lose something of the primordial quality of art, and are left a model of art that is 'something unreal and unauthentic'[152].

If we apply this particular understanding of myth to art, then we see that art has a potential to communicate universally through deep symbolism in a way that is not as straightforward as reading signs, that is instead intuitive, spontaneous and instinctive.

Unfortunately, in Lem's novel *HMV* (1968), interpretation based upon any understanding of the unconscious mind was impossible again due to lack of prior knowledge about the origins of the alien message. To begin with, the scientists did not know if the senders comprised two sexes, as on earth.

> The general meetings almost always ended in open quarrels. The most petulant, I would say, were the psychoanalysts; they were especially aggressive in their

[151] EDWARDS, M. 2001. Jungian Analytic Art Therapy. *In:* RUBIN, J. A. (ed.) *Approaches to Art Therapy: Theory and Technique.* New York: Brunner- Routledge. Pg. 87

[152] JUNG, C. 2003. *The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature,* London Routledge Classics Pg. 93

> demands- they wanted the appropriate experts to decipher the "literal" layer of the stellar message so that they could then set to work determining the entire system of symbols employed by the civilization of the Senders. Here, of course, came the inevitable rejoinder, in the form of a bold hypothesis, that the civilization might reproduce asexually, which perforce would desexualise its "symbolic lexicon" and thereby in advance doom to failure any attempt at psychoanalytic penetration[153]

As it follows in Lem's novel, scientists subjected the MFTS to numerous hybrid psychological theories, all to no avail. In this quoted passage, the 'penetration' of psycho-sexual analysis as a key to interpretation (to 'open' the code) is mimicked by the aggressive scientists seeking to 'master' the elusive meaning.

Similarly, the psychological penetration of my paintings is limited by a lack of specific psychoanalytic data. Yet even if analysts could invade the deeper subconscious significance of my paintings, would something important be lost in the explanation?

Despite the inspiration that theories involving concepts of psychoanalysis have given artists, Jung wrote that in interpreting art, we lose something of the mystery, rather like the way in which explaining a joke loses or negates its humour. Jung (1941) accepts that such rigorous understanding is inherently flawed:

> We have to break down life and events, which are self-contained processes, into meanings, images, concepts, well knowing that in doing so we are getting further away from the living mystery .[154]

He added that the interpretation of art might not be necessary from the perspective of the art world, and questioned whether art necessarily had meaning at all. Perhaps then, art is like nature in this respect-- that it simply *is*. [155]

---

[153] LEM, S. 1983. *His Master's Voice,* New York, Northwestern University Press. Pg. 68
[154] JUNG, C. 2003. *The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature,* London Routledge Classics Pg.78

5.5 Mythic Structure

Yet we have noted that although Joseph Campbell referred to Jung, he did not take an explicitly psychoanalytic approach to myth, although Campbell's work is derived from a psychological approach begun by Otto Rank.

By comparison, Claude Levi-Strauss believed that myth functioned to resolve the basic social contradictions of human experience. Following on from Joseph Campbell's universalising comparative approach, Claude Levi-Strauss, helped make anecdotal evidence more academically acceptable. Yet according to Segal (2004), Levi-Straus dispenses with the narrative of myth, or diachronic dimension that interested Campbell, and finds meaning in the synchronic dimension, or structure of the myth.

This thesis considers ways of understanding art and explaining art, yet Levi-Strauss (1963) claims that it is a peculiarity of modern thought to provide such a critical examination of custom, and to attempt to produce an explanation of cultural texts such as myth and art. Proponents of the method of structural anthropology argue that Western society deals with several problem-solving modes of thought and action, including psychoanalysis, that tend to include elements of unconscious self-examination. They attribute these various modes to the result of our historical encounter with the New World[156]. Levi-Strauss claims that humans otherwise tend to act and think according to habit. He says that in 'primitive cultures' [sic: left undefined here for the sake of expediency], it is very rare that a custom or a cultural institution will be accompanied with any sort of explanation, other than that is the way it was always done'[157]

---

[155] Ibid. Pg.77
[156] LEVI-STRAUSS, C. 1963. *Structural Anthropology,* London, Basic Books. Pg.19
[157] Ibid. Pg. 18

> Even in our own society, table manners, social etiquette, fashions of dress, and many of our moral, political, and religious attitudes are scrupulously observed by everyone, although their real origin and function are often not critically examined[158].

Later we shall consider how Wittgenstein redefines ways of understanding cultural forms such as myth, and consider the implications this has for the analysis of my paintings.

Levi-Strauss was particularly interested in the work of anthropologist Franz Boas (1858 –1942), a German-American anthropologist and a pioneer of modern anthropology. Boas pre-empted André Malraux's interest in the implications of the museum presentation of anthropological pieces, and Boas challenged principles of museum display. The evolutionary approach led curators to organize objects according to technological development. Boas, however, felt that the form of an object reflected the social and cultural circumstances under which it was used. Boas understood that even artefacts that were similar might have developed in very different contexts and for different reasons.

Both Levi-Strauss' and Boas' arguments reinforce once again; the significance of context is determining meaning.

5.6 Context and Diversity

There are a great many artists today who define themselves as 'socially engaged artists', with a creative practice that is based on mediating experiences for and with the public community. However, when current artwork becomes detached from the communities and historical traditions to which the artists belong, meaning begins to slip, allowing it

[158] JNR., G. S. (ed.) 1989. *A Franz Boas Reader: Shaping of American Anthropology, 1883-1911,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Pg.18

to mean almost anything. The dead shark in a tank of formaldehyde is just a dead shark unless we are told what it 'symbolizes'. Largely arbitrary symbolism is likely to determine meaning, or rather ‘meanings’.

For example, *Juxtapoz* magazine provided the springboard for Pop Surrealism, has recently been focussing on graffiti art, or street art, by street art crews such as Blu from Bologna, Nunca and Os Gemeos from São Paulo, and Sixeart from Barcelona, and even Banksy from Bristol, that on first appearance are very much connected to social context.

Os Gêmeos (The Twins in Portuguese) are identical twin brother street artists, from São Paulo, Brazil. They began graffiti painting in 1987 and became prominent in the São Paulo street art scene. Their work includes large murals featuring yellow coloured characters. Like much original street art, the subject matter of their work is rooted in a cultural history specific to Sao Paulo. It involves social and political comment on São Paulo, as well as Brazilian folklore, and their art style was influenced by the Brazilian pixação movement, a form of graffiti native to Brazil, known for its simple, angular lines. It consists of tagging done on high and difficult to get to buildings and structures, using climbing techniques and abseiling to reach sites.

Os Gêmeos achieved much of its success internationally because on art webpages the work effectively demonstrates the frisson between the urban environment and colourful graphic artworks.

However, recently these art-pieces have been recreated by the artists across the world, away from their original local context, as a curiosity, and an eclectic disengaged art collection. The images are as likely to be appearing on the walls of derelict buildings in Berlin, or in the Tate Gallery in London, as on the streets of Sao Paulo. This art form has become detached from its historical and cultural environment, the symbolism becomes detached allowing it to mean almost anything at all.

The aforementioned mythologists tell us that when society separates the artefact from its social function, the art loses authentic meaning. However, severed from its roots, art then gains the potential for a multiplicity of meanings, each as superficial as the next. The language and concepts used by art critics and artists becomes inaccurate and difficult to pin down. Artists talk about their own works in ways that fail to illuminate, and the artworks sink into a morass of obfuscation. In turn, detached from local context, the artists go on to produce work that is more open-ended.

5.7 Two Examples

The New York Times describe Os Gêmeos recent work in New York, as follows:

> While the onslaught of figures, episodes and colors is at first overwhelming, a casual left-to-right reading suggests some narrative possibilities. Basically what we have here is a tale of escape and growth that begins in darkness and — after taking a few tips from the Bible, Hieronymus Bosch and M. C. Escher — ends in a stunning vortex of brilliant color. At far left, in the gray dimness of a narrow, cell-like space, a small figure strains toward the golden light seeping through a chink in the wall. Wearing pants, a jacket and a girlish scalloped bonnet and shouldering a bag, she's leaving home, as the song says. A small spotted dog watches from the safety of a tenderly, elaborately wood-grained floor.
>
> Through the chink the golden world awaits, arrayed around and above what seems to be a nearly circular waterfall; it's a world populated by spirit guides, with or without gills. And it all adds up, or at least it is all visibly linked. You're supposed to keep going, from one thing to the next, gaining wisdom along the way.
>
> To sketch in some of the action, the connections begin with a boy on a four-poster bed (Dreamland's point of origin) with a peacock on his back, using a second

> peacock as an ear trumpet. He listens to a whale whose skin, a mosaic of blues, is dotted with extra eyes. Atop the whale lies a girl (maybe our heroine, but older) so relaxed that the dots on her lavender-pink blouse are rising into the atmosphere like bubbles. The whale's tail hooks over the rail of a snaking subway track, while the beast itself balances on a stack of three figures teetering on a rope bridge with iffy wood slats (San Luis Rey, anyone?) extending from one side of the waterfall to the other.

The work is described in terms that are as dreamy and fairy-tale-like, and with a prerequisite formalism that an explanation of painting demands, but meaning in this instance is ultimately illusive, transient, and indeterminate.

Another example, from an artist working explicitly towards the gallery market, is German artist Neo Rauch. Rauch, (1960 Leipzig, East Germany) is a German artist whose paintings suggest his personal history and perhaps a post-industrial estrangement. His works offer characteristics of socialist realism, and allude to the narrative absences within artworks of painter Giorgio de Chirico. Interviewed about his recent artwork, quoted here in a transcribed interview:

> *Interviewer: (And that's evidently not what you're striving for). Instead, you're creating an atmosphere of catastrophe.*
>
> NR: I do not deny that. First, I have turned around and become an observer of my own creations. It's clear there's a problematic core to them that's grounded in the Apocalypse. I approach the phenomena of this world by letting things go through me in a non-hierarchical order, and then putting together private, very personal mosaics from the filtered material. In the best case, this leads to patterns being

> created that point to something above and beyond what people generally attribute to the things.[159]

Rauch talks about the paintings also in a way that suggests he bears witness to their emergence. However, he concludes this segment of the interview by succumbing to absolute openness of interpretation that could apply to thousands of other artworks. Artists and critics explanations often possess a contingent link with the art they are describing: the work and the words exist independently of one another. Rauches works of art retain autonomy.

The separation between artist and work of art, inner and outer are confirmed in this interview. The interviewer, proposes that Rauch 'creates' an atmosphere of catastrophe. This explanation is blatantly superficial, yet, crucially what else is happening?

The meanings of his works of art are never obvious. They are an odd collage of nostalgic imagery, architectural features that dissolve and dissipate; and conflicts occur between men and women from ambiguously distant but probably recent histories.

Rauch was influenced by the work of Georg Baselitz (1938) a German painter who studied in the former East Germany, before moving to West Germany. Baselitz is a professor at the Hochschule der Künste art academy in Berlin.

Baselitz engages with issues of meaning in his writing and artwork. He is particularly well known for paintings from the 1970's that are painted upside down. One explanation has been that this is in order to liberate the subject and the expressive qualities of the medium. His works of art repeat what appear superficially to be Germanic mythic archetypes, but indicate a hidden network of meaning. The imagery includes of forests, animals, along with hands, knees, silver birch tree, eagles and falling

[159] LIEBS, H. 2006. *Nothing can embarrass me anymore* [Online]. Sight and Sound.com. Available: http://www.signandsight.com/features/972.html.

birds, the friend, the rebel, the poet, the shepherd, milk jugs and disembodied heads, the soldier, the woodman, domestic animals, carts and ploughs, alongside portraits of his wife Elke and self-portraits. These cascading images induce an embryonic world of European myth and folklore.

Baselizt once claimed that his work was exclusively about creating new ornaments[160]. Baselitz uses the term ironically in the sense that his paintings are not pure formal decoration, following predetermined frameworks of meaning. He followed anthropological mythographer Claude Levi Strauss' interest in 'primitive' African mythic art. Baselitz claims that his works of art, paintings and sculptures, are concerned with the generation of innovative and necessarily disharmonious meaning, the sense in which art work recreates new meanings that the audience has yet to catch up with, rather than pure decorative meaning, but a new order creating meaning in a formula for new myth making[161].

From my perspective, the most important aspect is that he advocates the necessity of creating a new visual vocabulary with which the audience is not familiar. My paintings, by comparison, take an existing and overly familiar iconic vocabulary, but decontextualize these icons to influence audience interpretation.

Neo Rauch would have been aware of such developments in Baselizt work, which goes some way towards apprehending the mythic obscurity in Rauches work.

Referring again to Stanislaw Lem's novel *HMV*, the symbolic signification of the MFTS was unresolvable particularly because there was no key to meaning. Interpretation would conceivably continue eternally because the scientists were setting

[160] GRETENKORT, D. (ed.) 2010. *Georg Baselitz: Collected Writings and Interviews,* London: ridinghouse. Pg. 82
[161] Ibid. Pg. 86

up a dualistic framework whereby they were attempting to identify the intention of the creator of the MFTS. Thus, each interpretation was as valid as the next. Because the scientists lacked the social and cultural contexts of its origins, the meaning of the MFTS would remain mysterious, or worse, become a passive screen for the projection of fear and paranoia.

5.8 Delineating Meaning

An absence of the social and cultural contexts leads to uncertainty of meaning. Myth in word and image appears to represent a world of fantasy that is divorced from this social and historical context, and overloaded with analogy and metaphor. Everything within myth seems to refer to something else. For example, the Romantic painting of the Scottish national myth *Ossian* by French painter Anne-Louis Girodet *Ossian Receiving the Generals of the Republic* (1802) shows the blind bard welcoming the dead heroes of France to the other side, surrounded by warriors of the afterlife, symbolic birds, and floating maidens. Girodet's painting illustrates a dream space without historical or geographic setting, and situates heroes of recent French history in timeless northern myth. This disconnection with the here and now of contemporaneity leads us to believe that anything in the painting could, and must, refer to something else, something of more present cultural significance.

However, as we have identified earlier, despite this lack of context, Umberto Eco's (1994) later works claim that it is not entirely accurate to describe myth in terms of meaningless indeterminate symbolism. Eco argues that myths embody a contextualising influence that limits the potential multiplicity of interpretations:

> Many modern theorists have too strict a definition of symbol…if a myth is a tale, then it is a text. And this text is the exegesis of a symbol. A text is a place where

> the 'irreducible polysemy of symbols is in fact reduced because in a text symbols are anchored to their context.[162]

In painting also, visual symbols occur within a context that confine their variety of potential interpretations integrally, from within the piece itself. The broader meaning of Girodet's painting is outlined when we consider the context, not of immediate representational geography within the paintings imagery, but our collective awareness of firstly, James Macpherson's impulse in unifying the fragmented tales of *Ossian*, and secondly, the immediate history of the painting's benefactor, Napoleon, each of which serve to reduce the multiplicity of potential meanings of this mythic painting.

Levi-Strauss also claims that meaning is delineated in myth, in that it offers a unique approach to symbolism that embodies both the structure and integrity of the individual event. For example, in his analysis of the *Oedipus Rex* myth, he considers the myth within the context of the whole cycle of tales connected with the city of Thebes[163]. Levi-Straus began to identify repeated designs within the myth. He argued that we should understand myth as an orchestral score rather than linear one-after-another type of word pictures. [164]

Such repeated phrases occur at different scales within painting also. The fugue, by comparison, is a musical form consisting of a theme repeated a fifth above or a fourth below its first statement. Similarly, Cezanne's self-portrait exhibits repeated diamond motifs within the design that may say more than the apparently straightforward 'narrative' implies. Yet the repeated diamond motif does more than to unify the image pictorially.

---

[162] ECO, U. 1994. *The Limits of Interpretation,* Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press. Pg. 20

[163] LEVI-STRAUSS, C. 1963. *Structural Anthropology,* London, Basic Books. Pg. 216

[164] Levi Strauss (1963) writes that only by, considering the position of each myth within its larger structure, and interrelations of components can we hope to reveal its meaning.
We have to understand the myth as a totality and discover that the basic meaning of the myth is not conveyed by the sequence of events.

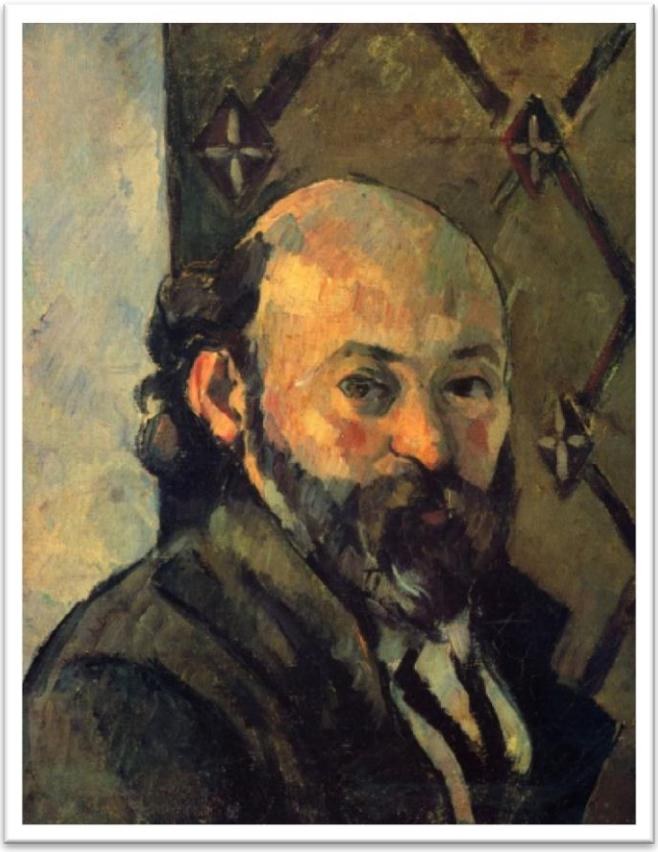

Figure 38. Cezanne. P. (1879-1882) ***SELF-PORTRAIT,*** [Oil on canvas, 66 x 53.3cm] National Gallery of Art, Washington

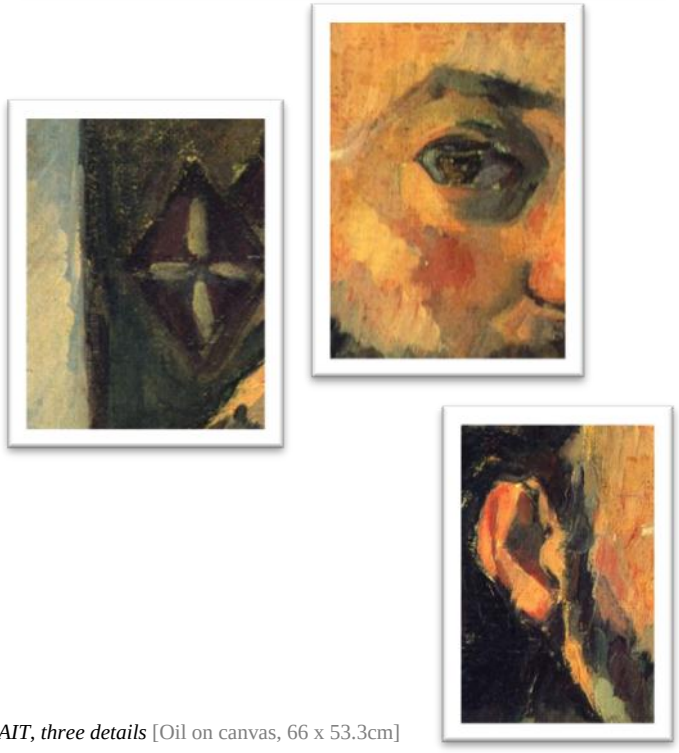

Figure 39. Cezanne. P. (1879-1882), ***SELF-PORTRAIT, three details*** [Oil on canvas, 66 x 53.3cm] National Gallery of Art, Washington

Although Cezanne did not reveal his intention in including the diamond symbol, as a devout Roman Catholic, with knowledge of art history, Cezanne would have been fully aware that everything in religious symbolism has a meaning.

For example, the diamond may characteristically represent durability and enduring faith. Alternatively, St. Teresa of Avila provided a well-known example of Catholic diamond symbolism from the sixteenth century. She writes in her book *Interior Castle* (1579), 'I saw the soul as a castle made of a single diamond containing many rooms'. [165] The vision of the soul as a single diamond containing many rooms, just as in Heaven there are many mansions. She describes the various rooms through which the soul passes in its quest for perfection before reaching the innermost chamber, the place of complete transfiguration and communion with God.

Levi-Straus in *Structural Anthropology* (1963) considers repeated motifs in the structure of the Oedipus myth (and associated tales), and discovers that the following repeated themes occur:

- Overly intimate blood relations: (sexual)
- Less than intimate blood relations (murder)
- The killing of Monsters
- Difficulties in walking upright: reduced mobility

Levi Straus argues that the Oedipus myth represents the tension between overly intimate blood relations to less than intimate blood relations, and points to how we define our relationship with our parents: issues of proximity and intimacy with parents. Therefore, for Levi-Strauss the fundamental meaning of the myth is society's difficulty in accepting that we are born from the coming together of man and woman, in a society

[165] AVILA, T. O. 2008. *Interior Castle,* Radford, Wilder Publications, 2008. Pg.32

that intuitively believes we are, what Levi Strauss describes as autochthonous, or formed from a single place[166]. The myth communicates, and perhaps goes some way towards reconciling tensions between theory and experience.

Interestingly, Stanislaw Lem uses such devices in, for example, his novel *Tales in Pirx the Pilot* (1990), in which two flies on a control panel parody the fate of two trainee spaceship pilots during an exercise. The general theme of the tale is contained within this repeated incidental motif. Lem thereby applies a characteristic of mythic structural that occurs independently of linear narrative.

It is worth noting that although Lem's *HMV* refers only briefly to mythology and mythic interpretation Lem himself was attracted to mythic considerations in literature, and indeed wrote several articles that proposed the genre of science fiction as the Myth of the 21st Century. In fact, Lem's *HMV* tale as a whole may be understood as a 20thC Promethean myth of sorts, of which the protagonist Hogarth is very well aware.

Yet how are such characteristics of mythic form applied to the understanding of art, and painting? As we have seen, recent methods of understanding art have moved away from absolute analysis of the work of art itself, to the viewer/object nexus, and to such historical and cultural determinants as may be applied. Consequently, a reconsideration of myth, stemming from Joseph Campbell's (1949) notions of universality, and Levi-Strauss's (1963) identification of myth's structuralism, potentially open up the sense in which the explanation of art, by analogy, is more fluid, diverse, and more socially and culturally determined, than was previously acknowledged.

[166] LEVI-STRAUSS, C. 1963. *Structural Anthropology,* London, Basic Books. Pg.216

5.9 Archetypal Form

Mythic explanations of art and literature are characterised by the notion of the archetype, the images, symbols and structures that reoccur throughout time and culture. Moreover, as we have seen, this is likely to include reference to the works of Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell. Some other major figures include Philip Wheelwright, Robert Graves, Francis Fergusson, Leslie Fiedler, Northrop Frye, Maud Bodkin, and G. Wilson Knight. These critics extract archetypes and essential mythic formulae from the genres and individual plot patterns of literature. However, mythic analysis does not necessarily require the work of art to have explicitly mythic elements.

Maud Bodkin (1875–1967) was the first to apply Jung's theories of collective unconscious, archetype, and primordial images to literary criticism. In 1934, she explored such structures in literature in *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry: Psychological Studies of Imagination.* Taking an early feminist perspective she considered 'The Image of Woman' namely the way in which women are represented across literature including the work of Dante, Milton, and Goethe's Faust, and Greek mythology. From these works, Bodkin lays the foundation for Northrop Frye's mythic interpretive frameworks of Heaven and Hell, as central archetypes in literature.

Amy Maud Bodkin influenced Canadian Art critic Northrop Frye (1912-1991). However, Frye makes the distinction of shifting the notion of the archetype from the psychological to the literary. Frye proposes that concealed symbolic narratives exist across all humankind, and all history, and have the potential to influence our lives at an almost imperceptible level. Thus, he makes myth his most important concept, advocating a *new poetics* that is the principle of his mythological framework.

Frye considers the mythic analysis of painting in *Anatomy of Criticism*[167], although his work typically engages with literature. Frye organises archetypes into several groupings interpreted through further modes.[168]

Frye (1971) presents the following example of a mythic schema with which to understand art, based upon the cycle of fertility myth[169]. Each season is associated with a literary genre: comedy with spring, romance with summer, tragedy with autumn, and satire with winter. Comedy is associated with spring because the genre of comedy is characterized by the birth of the hero, revival and resurrection. In addition, spring symbolizes the defeat of winter and darkness. Romance and summer are connected because summer is the culmination of life in the seasonal calendar, and the romance genre ends with some sort of triumph, usually marriage. Autumn is the dying stage of the calendar, which parallels the tragedy genre because it is known for the demise of the protagonist. Satire is associated with winter because satire is a dark, disillusioned and mocking form, and the defeat of the heroic figure.

Interestingly Frye then goes on to associate such archetypal representation with a sort of existential realism, in which he asserts the primacy of basic needs over ideology, Frye says:

> Why was I so fascinated by Frazer? Because he linked mythology with anxiety about the food supply – a primary concern. Why am I fascinated by *The White Goddess*, a wrong-headed book in so many ways? Because it links mythology with sexual anxiety, a primary concern. Why did I get so fascinated by that sibyl

[167] FRYE, N. 1971. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essay,* Princeton, Princeton University Press.
[168] Frye distinguishes his work from psychoanalytical precursors of Jung and the anthropology of Frazer. As for Jung, Frye was uninterested in the collective unconscious on the grounds that it was unnecessary: since the unconscious is unknowable, it cannot be studied. Furthermore, how archetypes came to be was also of no concern to Frye; rather, the function and effect of archetypes is his interest. Though he is dismissive of Frazer, Frye uses the seasons in his archetypal schema.
[169] FRYE, N. 1971. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essay,* Princeton, Princeton University Press.

> G.R Levy? Because she linked mythology to shelter and buildings, a primary concern. Food, sex, shelter *are* the primary concerns.'[171]

5.10 The Cosmogonic Body

Frye's schema intends to redress a contemporary imbalance by prioritising the elemental needs of the body over the conceptual needs of society. For Frye, myth has the potential to redress this imbalance. In fact, Gill (2006) compares Frye with postmodern theorists who say that there is no meaning without perception, regulated through the body and individual consciousness. However, the body in this sense acts as metaphor for society, and for the broader workings of the universe. Thus, the individual consciousness has the potential to unite with the universal. Heinrich Robert Zimmer (1972) discusses this in relation to Indian Hindu symbolism and mythology. Zimmer describes how the creative act may represent the unification of the individual and the universal.

> The dance is an act of creation. It brings about a new situation and summons into the dancer a new and higher personality. It has a cosmogonic function, in that it arouses dormant energies which may then shape the world. On a universal scale, Shiva is the Cosmic Dancer; in his 'Dancing Manifestation' (nritya-murti) he embodies in himself and simultaneously gives manifestation to the Eternal Energy. The forces gathered and projected in his frantic, ever enduring gyration, are the powers of the evolution, maintenance, and dissolution of the world. Nature and all its creatures are the effects of his eternal dance.[172]

---

[171] NORTHROP FRYE, R. D. D. (ed.) 1991. *Myth and metaphor: selected essays, 1974-1988,* Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia. Pg.89

[172] ZIMMER, H. R. 1972. *Myths and symbols in Indian art and civilization,* Princeton, Princeton University Press. Pg. 152

The aim of mythical tales in Hindu philosophy, says Zimmer, are to convey such wisdom of the Hindu philosophers.[173]

Gill (2006) reflects upon the potential this has for Frye's interpretation of such mythography, and application to arts analysis:

> What is potentially epiphanic, however, as well as a surpassing of the conceptual and ideological continuum, is the occasion when that which is ecstatically engaged is not a transient aspect of human life such as cause, country, or name (which are secondary concerns), but a metaphor born of primary concern, an archetype of myth or literature. The occasion, in other words, when the essential, universal experience of the soma psychikon, structures and informs experienced reality… of the spirit-consciousness[174].

From Frye's perspective, the function of myth includes reconnecting us through the body to prime concerns, such as food and shelter. As such, myth in art becomes a form of tactile wisdom. This it achieves through universal symbolism; universal because it is determined by the primary needs of the body, and we all have these same physical needs.

A mythic interpretation of my sheep paintings may build upon Frye's analysis of the symbolism in the great western myth, the Bible, in his book *The Great Code* (1982), and could possibly proceed as follows, beginning the symbolic significance of sheep in the Bible:

> Then said Jesus…I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before Me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief

[173] Ibid. Pg. 39
[174] GILL, G. R. 2006. *Northrop Frye and the Phenomenology of Myth,* London, University of Toronto Press. Pg.193

> comes not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good Shepherd: the good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling…sees the wolf coming…and flees: and the wolf catches them, and scatters the sheep. The hireling flees, because he is an hireling, and cares not for the sheep. (10:1-13).

Fry (1982) says that sheep are an integral part of the structure of the Bible. He writes that such natural (archetypal) images of sheep and pasture have a peculiarly poetic function, of what he calls the ideal world, as opposed to the apocalyptical world. It follows, says Frye that there must be demonic imagery of ruins and wasteland. Does this explanation provide a parallel for the imagery of the sheep paintings? Ideal versus (or in tension with) apocalyptic? Frye (1982) presents the richness of understanding in such imagery, such as the way that sheep convey a sense of spiritual bewilderment. Old Testament writers used the imagery of the seminomadic life of a shepherd following and protecting his sheep as they go to pasture, often straying and getting lost in the process, to represent a people in a state of constant though often confused loyalty to their God.

Is such an attractive explanation likely? Probably not, because I only became aware of such an interpretation after I had made the paintings. Yet from the artist's perspective, such an explanatory framework offers a rich and ambitious way of interpreting painterly symbolism. It certainly allows the artist to 'get one's teeth' into the imagery, at a level that may connect to profound phenomenological concepts of the body. Such themes open the doors to a symbolism that has significance beyond the personal, on a universal level of understanding. Yet, as we shall see, there are difficulties with a mythic approach to art explanation.

5.11 Jung and Art

As has been mentioned earlier in this thesis, the applications of such themes have thrived in post-war art hoping for an approach that expressed universalism and similarity, as opposed to conflict and difference. Surrealists embraced the deep interconnection between myth and dream, and became explorers of the personal unconscious.[175] Jung in fact had a particularly universal view of the collective unconscious, expressed in myth religion and art, and Jung's criticism of Freud was that the significance of art cannot be in purely personal psychological material, but must transcend the person to universal characteristics of humanity. [176]

However, basing an interpretation of art on a concept that draws upon themes from outside art can also lead to difficulties. Jung's interpretation of Picasso's work avoided all reference to the art historical context in which Picasso's work was significant. Instead, Jung took a predictably more psychoanalytical approach. In Jung's (1974) final book, published posthumously, *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Sky*, he considers contemporary art as evidence that society is unravelling. Jung was critical of Picasso's painting, for example, describing Picasso's blue period as the potential beginning of schizophrenia [177].

5.12 The Limits to Mythic Explanation

A mythic explanation proposes a mechanism for analysis of artwork that might otherwise be difficult to understand. For example, Daniel Russell Brown (1970) claims that archetypal criticism '…provides numerous places of contact with the art work.'[178]

---

[175] GOLDING, J. 1995. *Visions of the modern,* London, University of California Press Pg.214
[176] ROSS, S. D. 1994. *Art and Its Significance: An Anthology of Aesthetic Theory* New York, State University of New York Press. Pg. 499
[177] JUNG, C. 1922-1941. *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Sky,* London, Routledge. Pg.214
[178] BROWN, D. R. 1970. A Look at Archetypal Criticism. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism,* 28.

However, there are clear limitations to an interpretation based upon concepts of myth. Daniel Russell Brown (1995) makes the point that perhaps the benefits of mythic analysis have at times been emphasized at the expense of artistry, so that credit is given to the myth rather than the expertise of the artist, for example.

Additionally, there is a risk of believing that myth provides the only valid interpretation and is, as such, the truth. This is a problem with all theory, mythic or otherwise, that there is the tendency to attempt to fit everything into the theory, and all explanations are likely to try and organise facts in favour of that particular explanation.

In these ways, mythic explanations of art, by enlarging and depersonalizing the expressive experience, threatens to destroy our experience of its complexity.

Clearly, some art forms, and indeed eras, are more appropriate for analysis involving concepts of myth than others, particularly those work of arts that already contain mythic elements. However, Laurence Coupe (1997) says that it is always possible to read some mythic connotation into contemporary cultural text.

5.13 Contemporary Myth: Apocalypse Now

Lawrence Coupe (1997) presents us with an interpretation of Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979), an epic American war film set during the Vietnam War. The plot concerns two US Army officers, Captain Benjamin L. Willard (Martin Sheen) and Colonel Walter E. Kurtz (Marlon Brando). Willard is sent on a journey into the jungle to assassinate Kurtz. The story is based upon Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902).

Coupe (1997) considers Frazer's idea of the Fertility Myth. This occurs in *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (1890), a comparative study of mythology and religion. Frazer's book is shown in Kurtz' room at the close of the film. Frazer's

proposition was that early myth represented the ritual of fertility cults that worshiped and periodically sacrificed a sacred king. Frazer claims that this legend is central to most of the world's mythologies.[179]

Coupe claims that in explaining *Apocalypse Now* in terms of Frazer's fertility myths we can see that the war in Vietnam as the antithesis of fertility. Thus, he claims that the mythic material in the film is used ironically. Therefore, 'Apocalypse Now' represents an application of mythic readings to an example of contemporary work.

Coupe says Coppola takes Conrad's linear mythic story and breaks it into smaller unconnected motifs. For example, scenes such as the tribe's people slaying buffalo, Coupe claims are an example of a primativist motif. The bombing of the temple he says is an apocalyptic motif. There are also various absurdities such as the iconographic dawn helicopter-bombing raid on a peaceful Vietnamese village in order to prepare the beach for surfing. Coupe argues that the juxtaposition of these various elements undermine their unique meaning.

In Lem's novel, *HMV* Professor Hogarth could be accused of similar iconoclasm because of the broad plurality of interpretive methods he employs, with no preference or discrimination.

5.14 A Plurality of Myths

In this sense, we must not speak of myth, but of a plurality of myths, and the authority of the single mythic story becomes weakened by the powerfully unique scenes:

[179] FRAZER, S. J. 1993. *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion,* Ware, Hertfordshire, Wordsworth Editions Ltd.

> What matters is the image. Any narrative we discern in Apocalypse Now is built up by the juxtaposition of images. [180]

However, Coupe's (1997) understanding of postmodern myth is probably not entirely what writer, philosopher and art critic Jean Francois Lyotard (1979) intended when he began to articulate the concept of postmodernism[181]. Lyotard spent some time considering what he called the pagan, notably in two books he published in: *Lessons in Paganism* (1977) *(Instructions paiennes)* and *Pagan Rudiments (Rudiments paiens).* According to Crome and Williams (2006), Lyotard reminds us that for the pagan, several gods and goddesses closely monitored every daily event. Perhaps therefore from Lyotard's perspective, the fragmented events in Apocalypse Now are bound together by a broader universal collective meaning. As stated by Crome and Williams (2006) Lyotard assures that for the pagan, the divine is the affirmation of the singularity of events, and not their negation[182]. Events and images celebrate unique individual significance. Therefore, rather than Coupe's assertion that such approaches are nihilistic, they in fact reaffirm understanding.

However, archetypal frameworks may seem too specific for the interpretation of such fragmented plurality. For example, Frye's version of archetypal criticism strictly categorizes works based on their genres, which determine how an archetype is to be interpreted in a text. The dilemma facing Frye's archetypal criticism is that categories may not be distinctly separate, and overlap in content and intention. In fact, Grenz (1996) identifies such a pluralistic approach to contemporary art generally:

---

[180] COUPE, L. 1997. *Myth,* London, Routledge. Pg.76

[181] LYOTARD, J. F. 1979. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* Manchester, Manchester University Press.

[182] WILLIAMS, K. C. A. J. (ed.) 1988. *The Lyotard Reader and Guide,* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd. Pg. 8

> Postmodern art, in contrast, moves from an awareness of the connectedness between what it acknowledges as its own and what it excludes. For this reason, it embraces stylistic diversity, or "multivalence". It chooses "impurity "rather than the purity of modernism[183].

Joseph Campbell's four volume *Masks of God* series (1962-1968), studied the historical development of myth of Primitive, Oriental, and Early Occidental societies. These he describes as 'grandiose unitary stages'. However Campbell goes on to say that, whereas the bulk of mythic themes have evolved slowly over thousands of years, in recent western culture the orthodox tradition has been fragmented into a 'galaxy of mythologies', to become, according to Campbell, a totally new, secular organizing force of society[184].

Myths are socially entities through which insights are revealed to the individual. However, Campbell (1968) draws particular attention to the category in myth of mythogenesis, or creative mythmaking.

> The individual has had an experience of his own-of order, horror, beauty, or even mere exhilaration- which he seeks to communicate through sign; and if his realization has been of a certain depth and import, his communication will have the value and force of living myth- for those, that is to say, who receive and respond to it of themselves, with recognition, uncoerced[185].

Campbell (1968) then proposes that in contemporary 'creative mythology', this form is turned on its head, and the individual imparts his or her experience to society.

---

[183] GRENZ, S. J. 1996. *A Primer on Postmodernism,* Cambridge, Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co. Pg.25
[184] CAMPBELL, J. 1968. *The Masks of God: Creative Mythology,* New York, The Viking Press. Pg. 3
[185] Ibid. Pg. 4

5.15 Summary

Myth and painting have gone hand in hand, because the combination of story and symbolism are powerful tools for the artist. Wilbur S. Scott (1966) writes that mythic analysis is a tempting route to take, because it promises so much:

> It occupies a curious position among other methods: it requires close textual readings, like the formalistic, and yet it is concerned humanistically with more than the intrinsic value of aesthetic satisfaction; it seems psychological insofar as it analyzes the work of art's appeal to the audience... and yet sociological in its attendance upon basic cultural patterns as central to that appeal; it is historical in its investigation of a cultural or social past, but non-historical in its demonstration of literature's timeless value, independent of particular periods[186].

Mythic notions of metaphor and pervasiveness are characteristics of some contemporary painting, yet contemporary myth is defined not by linear story, but fragmentation, that denies certain mythic notions of archetype. Lyotard claims that this plurality maintains important notions of meaning in the contemporary works that embody such an iconoclastic galaxy of mythologies.

Yet mythic explanations fail because they fail to maintain flexibility in their schema. Complex archetypal patterns fail ultimately for being too specific and too rigid and failing to adapt to the diversity that Lyotard identifies.

Therefore mythic analysis demands the challenging leap of faith to accept its assumption that familiar underlying archetypal frameworks unify all myths, all cultures and histories. This is a leap that Professor Hogarth of Lem's *HMV*, was not comfortable making.

---

[186] ELIOT, W. S. S. G. O. T. S. (ed.) 1963. *Five Approaches of Literary Criticism,* London: Macmillan Pub Co. Pg.247

The experience and understanding of painting is also characterised by such simultaneous diversity. If we attempt to explain my paintings, we may consider tone, line, colour, and composition. We see textures, representational features, and depending upon the nature of the painting, symbolism. We may consider this symbolism in archetypal terms; in relation to specific mythic narratives; or we may identify recurring mythic motifs and patterns of opposites and integration within the structure of the symbolism; alternatively, we may identify a plurality of individual autonomous mythic narratives.

If a painting represents a Buddha, a robot, a sheep, or a landscape then these images integrate within the overall visual structure of the painting. In some cases, in some Odd Nerdrum's paintings, for example, it is as if we have to look through an obscurity of painterly mark making, of scraping and layering and rubbing back, to reveal representational content. All these things happen together at the same time: tone, composition; symbolism; mythic representation. When we talk about works of art, we should not hope for a single concluding explanation, mythic or otherwise. Different explanations do not compete with one another to be the most accurate, but supplement one another, perhaps also revealing contradictions, ironic or otherwise, within the work.

This final section considers how Wittgenstein (1979) expands upon such issues regarding myth and diversity, and how his comments on myth tend to lead to a suspicion of explanation in any form. This intention of this chapter is to present a way of explaining art in a voice that demonstrates something of the richness, diversity, and strangeness of myth and art.

Chapter 6: A Mythic Thought Experiment - Hagberg and Wittgenstein

6.1 Introduction

This final chapter thinks through Wittgenstein's reflections on myth and, and how a reconsideration of his ideas propose incredulity towards the single unified explanation of my paintings.

Therefore, this chapter considers an approach to myth that is intentionally other than conventional archetypal explanation, anthropological explanation, literary structural explanation, or historical explanation. This involves the application of a thought experiment to the way in which we explain art, and a critical approach to art explanation that is derived from Hagberg's (1995) interpretation of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*[187].

Scottish anthropologist Sir James George Frazer's comparative study of mythology *The Golden Bough* (1915) directly inspired Wittgenstein's later practice. Wittgenstein believed that Frazer had failed to do justice to the strangeness, and otherness of the mythic material available to him. Wittgenstein's practice of presentation and description considered problems of communication from an ethnological point of view that was essentially concerned with issues of context and social interaction.

Hagberg (1995) applies Wittgenstein's concept of 'family resemblance' and overlapping characteristics that define criteria and allow inclusion into a category. Consequently, Hagberg demonstrates a way of presenting examples that fit our understanding of a term, but demonstrate difference within the category, as a way of opening up and problematicising various terms. This is one of many concepts that hold significance for the deeper understanding of art.

[187] RHEES, R. (ed.) 1979. *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough,* Chippenham and Eastbourne: The Byrnmill Press Ltd.

Hagberg's interpretation of Wittgenstein's approach involves using a variety of carefully considered context sensitive *examples* as the key tool by which we can begin to escape conceptual errors of art explanation that do not embrace the richness and diversity of approaches that define art practice, and understanding of the art-piece itself.

Hagberg's examples serve to identify art explanation that may be lofty, indiscriminate or shallow misrepresentations of experience. By way of contrast, Hagberg's approach presents a sensitive and insightful understanding of art as multiform aesthetic practice.

This approach begins by reasserting a generally held assumption. It then goes on to consider a variety of examples in order to reconsider a generally accepted assumption. The assumption, such as 'painting is like poetry' may not be entirely inaccurate, but strict adherence to such an explanation of painting denies the multiplicity of ways in which we experience and know painting, and art generally.

6.2 Multiform Aesthetic Experience.

To begin with, it seemed perfectly natural to me that this study was to have involved looking at the paintings that I have painted, and then explaining them through written text. This was to have involved reflecting upon my inner processes, feelings, and perceptions, and fitting such explanations into words to create a written thesis. I would also have had to refer to the contemporary theories within the research area, to add deeper insight and academic legitimacy to the thesis that I would finally present alongside the paintings.

Yet an explanation of my paintings from Wittgenstein's perspective, according to Hagberg (1995), identifies a problematic conceptual division between explanation and painted image; between the experience of the painting, and the explanation. This division may frustrate the apparently straightforward analysis of the artwork. The

following section, examines more closely some situations in which this happens. The first example is a translation of Hagberg's example of a musicology conference, applied to a presentation given by a painting tutor[188].

6.3 Some Further Examples

Consider an example that involves Scottish Landscape painting. The Highland landscape was a key subject in Scottish art at the end of the 18th century[189]. The highly influential text, James Macpherson's *The Poems of Ossian* represented a peculiarly context specific Romantic bond between landscape and literature. Professor Murdo Macdonald (2010) writes that *Ossian* embodies a very particular ecological setting:

> By way of conclusion, I reiterate this point. Northern epics such as *Ossian* and Kalevala are more than just narrative structures, for they also deal with northern environmental issues, such as bad weather and mist and rivers in spate and forests. While narrative structures are often transferable, what does change notably between different epics is the weather, the light and the immediate ecology.[190]

In the history of art Romanticist painting embraced landscape and the representation of the sublime for the first time as a subject[191]. And it would be reasonable to assume that my landscape painting *Even in Gàidhlig, I Exist* can be explained in such terms.

---

[188] HAGBERG, G. L. 1995. *Art as Language: Wittgenstein, Meaning, and Aesthetic Theory,* New York, Cornell University. Pg. 68

[189] ALEXANDER MOFFAT, A. R. 2008. *Arts of Resistance: Poets, Portraits and Landscapes of Modern Scotland,* Haddington, Luath Press. Pg.61

[190] MACDONALD, M. 2010. Art as an Expression of Northernness: The Highlands of Scotland. *Visual Culture in Britain***,** 355-369.

[191] ALEXANDER MOFFAT, A. R. 2008. *Arts of Resistance: Poets, Portraits and Landscapes of Modern Scotland,* Haddington, Luath Press. Pg. 68

Yet in attempting to provide a written explanation of my painting *Even in Gàidhlig, I Exist*, I began to question the fit between the word of the text and the experience of the painting. At a preliminary level, in writing about painting, does the straightforward and relatively unequivocal word 'landscape' fit our experience of landscape in oil painting? To begin with, if I repeat, the word *landscape* to myself, like a mantra: 'Landscape…landscape…landscape…landscape…landscape…landscape…landscape…landscape…landscape…'

To the point at which the word seems to lose meaning and becomes only a sound, do I feel as though I am getting closer to the crux of the painting? In fact, I begin to feel that the word and the image begin to separate from one another. Arguably, I am so familiar with the term word 'landscape' in the context of Fine Art that my amassed understanding of the term 'landscape' does say something meaningful to me about the painting. However, if we look at the relationship in terms of an example, there are several difficulties to address.

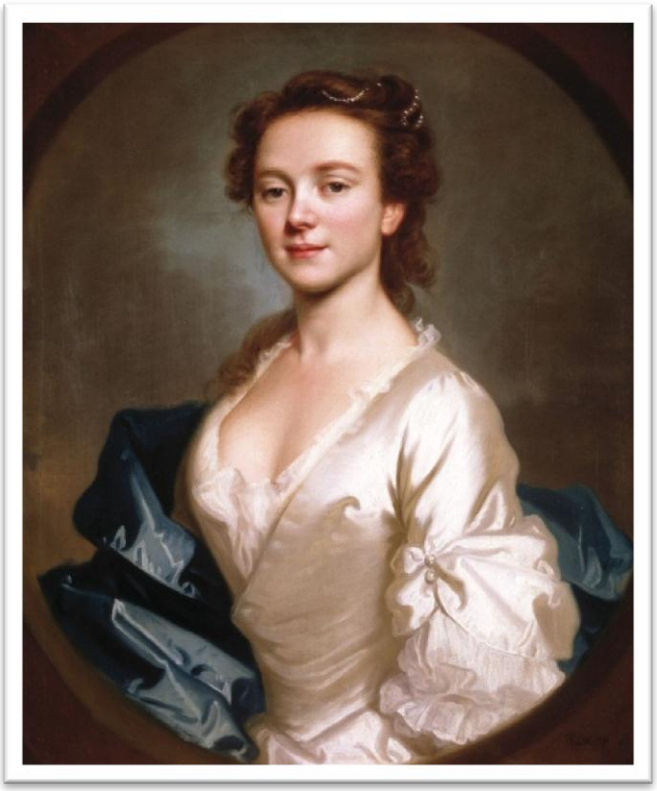

Figure 40. Ramsay. A. (1741), ***MISS CRAGIE,*** [Oil on canvas76 x 63 cm] The Berger Collection

Suppose that we are attending a lecture on *The Golden Age of Scottish Landscape Painting*. Unbeknownst to the speaker, when editing his talk the night before, a glitch in PowerPoint has inadvertently put the portrait of *Miss Craigie* by Allan Ramsay[192] into the presentation whenever he refers to the word *landscape*. However, in the concluding section of the talk the images remain, as they should be.

As the talk continues, the lecturer says:

…Jacob More's most important surviving Scottish landscape (**shows portrait of *Miss Craigie***) involved using a cool palette dominated by greys and greens. He builds up his

Figure 41. More. J. (Probably 1771) THE FALLS OF CLYDE (CORRA LINN) [Oil on canvas, 79.40 x 100.40 cm] National Galleries of Scotland

> composition from simplified, block-like masses and his free, rhythmic handling of the brush.[193]

The audience whisper uncomfortably to each other to reaffirm that they have seen and heard correctly as they realise the mistake that the lecturer has made, and consciously swap the image in their mind throughout the remainder of the talk. Finally, there is relief amongst the audience as the lecturer presents More's painting and reads the concluding sentence:

> 'More's landscape combines a much greater degree of topographical particularity with grandeur of effect'.[194]

So, do the painting and the word fit in this case? Possibly, to a degree, because we recognise the collective relief of the audience at the end of the talk. The curious thing

[193] MACMILLAN, D. 1986. *Painting in Scotland: The Golden Age,* Oxford, Phaidon Press Limited. Pg. 138
[194] MORE, J. 1897. The Falls of Clyde (Corra Linn). National Gallery of Scotland Bequest of James Ramsay MacDonald.

about this case is that it makes more sense because we understand it in relation to our initial comparison between the word 'landscape', and my oil painting.

Interestingly, this introduces the following observation. During the lecture, we do not experience the correct-order-images in exactly the same way as those that were not in the correct order. Therefore, as Hagberg argues, although the fit occurs within strictly defined parameters, 'It is clear that there is no continuous sense or experience of fittingness'.[195]

Therefore, the above lecture *should* have presented us with an example of the way that the word matches our experience of the painting. However, it did not, because the lecturers Power-point software failed.

According to Hagberg (1995) then, this introduces a problem. Do the above examples make it clear that we can exchange aspects of word and painting without misunderstanding? Are we entirely confident that we can interchange word, painting and meaning without confusion?

It might be useful to look at the situation another way, and consider the usefulness of the word 'landscape' in isolation. How can it be possible that the multiplicity of thoughts that we associate with the word 'landscape' fit satisfactorily with the single word 'landscape'? How can we unambiguously connect all we know, think and feel about 'landscape', with the word 'landscape'?

For example, the term landscape arbitrarily reminds me of Da Vinci's misty, craggy backgrounds to *The Mona Lisa*.

[195] HAGBERG, G. L. 1995. *Art as Language: Wittgenstein, Meaning, and Aesthetic Theory,* New York, Cornell University. Pg. 69

Figure 42. Da Vinci. L. (Between 1503 and 1505), *THE MONA LISA (or La Joconde, La Gioconda),* [Oil on poplar, 76.8 × 53 cm] Musée du Louvre

In turn, to myself, I find that I inadvertently evoke a stream of uncertain associations with this image, beginning with: '*apparently Da Vinci developed landscapes by scrunching up a piece of coffee stained paper and working into the discovered resulting patterns'* and continuing from there.

When we think about the term landscape, we associate a vast multiplicity of styles and considerations from the history of landscape painting. The abundance of images and associated thoughts and ideas that we connect to the word landscape, the array of varied approaches to the representation of Scottish and Highland thoughts, feelings and memories, all fit into the single word 'landscape'. Yet although the word seems separable from these meanings, it is not. It is impossible to perceive the word 'landscape' separately from our ideas, feelings, memories and perceptions of it.

Concerning the term landscape, instinctively there should be no difficulty concerning our frames of reference. We all know what landscape is, and we all know what

landscape painting is. The term refers to the painterly representation of natural scenery such as 'a cove, a mountain lake, '…the grey that drifts over the sea after a storm'[196]

The pantheon of historical landscape painting illuminates our understanding of landscape painting. The Golden Age of Scottish landscape representation in painting began with the Norie firm of painters, who applied Scottish landscape features to classical painting format. During the prolific cultural evolution of the Scottish Enlightenment, from the eighteenth century to the mid nineteenth, such painting in Scotland was pursued by the likes of Jacob More, Alexander Naysmyth, David Roberts, Hugh William Williams John Thomson of Duddingston, and Robert Scott Lauder culminating in the work of William MacTaggart, later in the century. [197]

Such representation of landscape is routed in our understanding of the interaction between art, nature, science and cultural identity. The term landscape painting unquestionably refers to art where the main subject is in wide format (as opposed to portrait) view, with elements formally arranged into a visually articulate composition.

Yet Jean-Francois Lyotard demands that we examine more closely, what we accept by the term landscape. He proposes that there are complexities within this apparently straightforward question of representation. Although we intuitively know that the term 'landscape' could not refer to anything else, do the methods of depiction accessible to me as a painter manifest what I, or indeed we, experience of landscape in its entire unequivocal sensory-ness. To what extent can I write of, paint of, compose and recreate the stench of damp peat; the harsh rasp of dry gorse against trouser leg, the nip of the midgie, the cool pint after a hot sweaty day in the hills, for example?

[196] BENJAMIN, A. (ed.) 1989. *The Lyotard Reader,* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers. Pg. 213
[197] MACMILLAN, D. 1986. *Painting in Scotland: The Golden Age,* Oxford, Phaidon Press Limited. Pg. 137

Lyotard goes further, and is sceptical of our ability to pin down just precisely what and where landscape may refer to in "Scapeland":

> Anyone who asks me, 'Where does your landscape take place?' is prescribing me a topography and a chronography of the mark that is landscape. Yet it is clear that landscapes do not come together to make up a history and a geography. They do not make up anything they scarcely come together at all.[198]

He wonders precisely which frames of reference are appropriate to apprehend landscape:

> The mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms are ordered by knowledge, and knowledge takes to them quite spontaneously. They are made, selected for one another. But a landscape is an excess of presence. My savoir-vivre is not enough. A glimpse of the inhuman, and/or of an unclean non-world (l'immonde). Is this still a form of order, a different form of order, as Kant suggests in his vesania? A displacement of the vanishing point? A vanishing of a standpoint rather.[199]

Perhaps then, the transcendent vastness of landscape negates all attempts to describe and circumscribe, in word or image. Yet Lyotard admits that there is no other way to express such experience:

> How could we capture the breath of wind that sweeps the mind into the void when the landscape arrives, if not in the texture of the written word?[200]

The showing and telling of what we know by landscape in art and explanation may be associated, but are entirely different forms.

---

[198] BENJAMIN, A. (ed.) 1989. *The Lyotard Reader,* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers. Pg. 218
[199] Ibid. Pg. 216
[200] Ibid. Pg. 216

From this perspective, our understandings and mental content that we attach to the thing that is the painting, represent a vast diversity of associated explanation and meaning.

6.4 Painting Is like Poetry?

Next, consider another example related to landscape painting, the common sense assumption that painting is like poetry. The intention of this study was initially to explore the way in which paintings are a manifestation of reflective inner experience. It seems natural, therefore, to accept without hesitation the viewpoint that painting is analogous to poetry: the art form most associated with the expression of feeling. Is it fair to say then, that painting and poetry are synonymous with one another?

An early example of this explanation is in Horace's 'ut pictura poesis', translated as 'as is painting, so is poetry'[201]. Yet in fact, this assumption has been misinterpreted from its conception. The argument originally declared that painters should show the same concern for the power of simplicity, unity, and the various pleasures that poetry could produce[202]. However, the phrase has been distorted and simplified to mean that painting and poetry are considered synonymous, and distinction between the two forms is casually overlooked[203].

The association between painting and poetry is flagged by the publication of *Arts of Resistance: Poets, Portraits and Landscapes of Modern Scotland* (2008), in which artist Alexander Moffat and poet Alan discuss the development of Scottish art. Alan Riach makes a link between painting and poetry when he says that his favourite painter of the 20th C is Irish artist John "Jack" Butler Yeats (1871 –1957). Yeats' works contain elements of Romanticism, and are grounded in fine observation and brilliant

[201] MANNS, J. W. 1997. *Aesthetics (Explorations in Philosophy)* London, M.E. Sharpe. Pg. 42
[202] Ibid. Pg. 43
[203] LEE, R. 1967. *Ut Pictura Poesis: Humanistic Theory of Painting (Norton Library titles in art, architecture and the philosophy of art)* New York, W. W. Norton & Co. Pg. 3

draughtsmanship. His brother was the poet William Butler Yates. Riach makes the connection between painting and poetry when he says:

> You know their father once remarked. 'One day I shall be known as the father of a great poet- and the poet is Jack!' [204]

However, in this book, Scottish landscape painting is also examined from a variety of competing viewpoints. The pair discuss cultural, political and artistic movements, the role of the artist in society and the effect of environment on artists from all disciplines.

As well as describing painting in poetic terms, Moffat and Riach also provide an historical, cultural and social explanation of Scottish landscape painting. For example, the pair describes Landseer as having made a sentimental package out of the landscape…cold and commercial …without connection to the place or the people[205]. William McTaggart's paintings are used as a comparison.

> With Mctaggart you are always conscious of the fact that people actually live in the highlands. These are inhabited landscapes…he was deeply aware of the social history of Scotland and remains the only painter of his time who really understood that beyond the façade of grandeur were real human beings living and working there. McTaggart came from a Gaelic –speaking crofting and fishing family in Kintyre, so when he painted a coastal scene he understood that he was painting from a socially engaged perspective.[206]

If, in explaining a painting, or series of paintings, we employ the familiar perspective that painting is like poetry, we must recognise both that such an assumption is mistaken

[204] ALEXANDER MOFFAT, A. R. 2008. *Arts of Resistance: Poets, Portraits and Landscapes of Modern Scotland,* Haddington, Luath Press. Pg.66
[205] Ibid. Pg. 63
[206] Ibid. Pg. 64

at its very origin, and that it denies the inclusion of all other explanations, including importantly, contextualising socio-historical issues.

Attempts to apprehend the plurality of contradictory explanations of art may benefit from Ludwig Wittgenstein's (1979) discussion of family resemblance in myth. For example, there is no single feature common to all things we call *paintings*, such as it being 'like' poetry. Rather all features of painting connect by a complex of associations that Wittgenstein calls family resemblances. In fact, Wittgenstein might argue that it is a mistake to insist that there must be something common with everything we know as painting. Knowing painting does not therefore involve apprehending some single quintessential characteristic of painting.

6.5 Can't All Sorts of Things Happen Here?

The explanation that painting is like poetry is not satisfactory in itself to sustain this understanding of art, and Hagberg's application of *examples* discover the multiplicity within this idea. Considering the following imaginary examples may help further:

Steven Campbell, having stepped back from painting in *Elegant Gestures of the Drowned after Max Ernst* (1993) may have been asked by an art student 'does the symbolism of sheep and mountains communicate expressively something of the post Culloden trashing of Highland culture, and subsequent displacement of West Coast population?', Campbell may have replied belligerently that the painting communicates nothing. Nothing of nature, humanity, politics, or social message, but exists purely for its own sake.

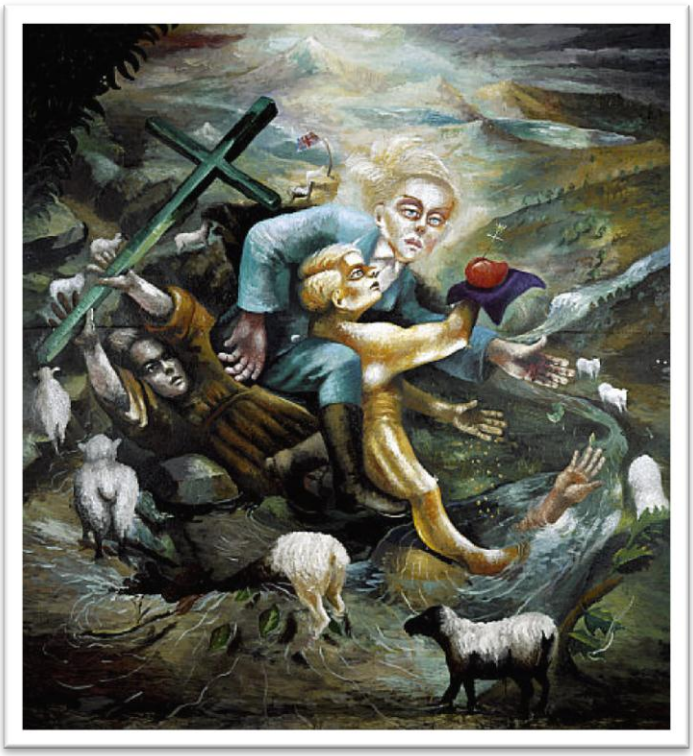

Figure 43. Campbell. S. (1993), ***ELEGENT GESTURES OF THE DROWNED AFTER MAX ERNST*** , [Oil on canvas, 262.00 x 238.40 cm] National Galleries of Scotland

Next, in developing the triptych *Allegory*, Port Seton artist John Bellany(1964) may have been ‘noodling’, or doodling with charcoal and paint on a blank canvas with images and marks as they came to him. He may discover where a dark mass wants to go, and find how the painting wants to be composed. He might catch the way that direction of the tonal theme is heading and follow it, or the way in which certain imagery seems to demand augmenting or echoing elsewhere in the work. Presumably, at some point he ascertains the overall subject of the work, but then discovers the variations that this subject now presents to him.

Figure 44. Bellany. J. (1965) ***ALLEGORY,*** [Oil on hardboard (triptych), 212.40 x 121.80 cm] National Galleries Scotland

In painting, the cases of playful experimentation with unresolved imagery, absences, new materials, grounds, settings, shapes voids, all demonstrate the dynamic life in the materials themselves. The painter discovers rather than creates the life of the painting.

A similar example from my own work would be the way in which accident occurs throughout my creative process. When looked at in detail, there are always unintended consequences to the preparatory process of printing photographs of objects. I look forward with curiosity to the way in which prints can bleed, blur, and 'halo' colours and tones, and give birth to and all sorts of unintentional effects that pry the final work of art from the greedy fingers of my ego. I may have an approximation of what I will do during the course of the entire painting process, but to assume that the finished painting existed in my mind prior to the creative process as an entirely predetermined thought object is simply wrong.

Discovery of the expressive character of a particular juxtaposition of symbols and colours, or the discovery of the potent way in which an old favourite brush begins to

carry paint across the canvas when it should be ready for the bin, implies that we do not inject these gestures or materials with expressive life.

This section presented further *examples* of mythic thought experiments that occur throughout this thesis to different degrees. These experiments derive from Hagberg's interpretation of Wittgenstein's reflections upon myth. This approach demonstrated that within our experience of painting, all sorts of things happen here.

Chapter 7: Summary and Conclusion

7.1 Summary

This thesis's original contribution to knowledge emerges from the way in which it combines theory, practice and experience.

The thesis began by examining how my experience of Bosnia would, or could, be communicated through painting practice. Ultimately, aspects of myth as a form of knowledge were reconsidered, in terms of narrative, form, and as a way of thinking. Key writers included Joseph Campbell (1949), Carl Jung (1966) and Levi- Strauss (1963/1968), before finally interpreting Wittgenstein's (1979) remarks on myth as a process of understanding. Finally, this thesis suggested that if we are to consider any form of explanation, then we must consider with suspicion the likely answers that are revealed. Explaining what a work of art means is inherently problematic. It is not always appropriate, and potentially at odds with the experience of the artwork itself. The words used to describe the work of art, connect with the work of art, are often muddled or inaccurate. Therefore, this thesis considers several ways in which we understand and explain paintings, and art generally, and proposes that if we must carefully examine our assumptions about what it means to communicate what art means, meaningfully.

7.2 Explanations

Much contemporary art is explained in terms of historical justification and technique, rather than aesthetics.

Is such justification desirable or necessary? On the one hand, there is art, and on the other, we have the explanation of art, and the two are not the same. As a consequence art writing can miss the target, and equally misinform, as well as inform.

The written explanation of art embodies anything but a fixed set of terms and labels for multifarious elements of artwork, creative process and exhibition context. Meaning in written explanation is subject to a multiform network of creative actions and processes held together by context and determined by relations between words.

Art historian and critic Professor Duncan Macmillan argues that ideally works of art should not have to be justified. However, he also goes on to propose that our understanding of contemporary works of art should be secured to the aesthetics of pure shape, colour, tone, mark, and materiality: art for art's sake. He is advocating a form of explanation of art, but a circumscribed and unifying one[207].

According to Macmillan, it is possible to free the work of art to operate in a purely aesthetic way. We can de-emphasize narrative content, remove all moral purpose, and indeed remove the necessity for any kind of justification external to the work itself, much in the same way that music operates. Macmillan points to American-born, British-based artist James Abbott McNeill Whistler, who was opposed to sentimentality and moral allusion in painting, and advocated art for art's sake. Whistler made parallels between painting and music. He titled many of his paintings arrangements, harmonies, and nocturnes. For instance, alongside Manet at the Salon des Refuss in Paris, he exhibited a painting of a girl in a white dress called simply Symphony in White.

However, Macmillan goes on to add that this approach is considered rarely with contemporary art, which tends to attach to explanations that refer to all sorts of contingent qualities. A familiar theme in Macmillan's writing is that much contemporary art explanation is intentionally baffling, and utterly meaningless.

[207] MACMILLAN, D. 2010a. *Art: Lessons from a past master on making a good impression* [Online]. news.scotsman.com. Available: http://www.scotsman.com/news/art_lessons_from_a_past_master_on_making_a_good_impression_1_825093.

For example, from Macmillan's perspective we may consider the explanations provided by the Saatchi Gallery of the artwork of Karla Black, at the time of writing a current Turner prize nominee, to be announced at BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead on 5 December 2011. Macmillan, who has written on Blacks work in the past might, might describe her work in the following way[208]:

Karla Black develops installation collages that might be reputable works of art in themselves. However, the Saatchi Gallery seem to believe that her work is not allowed to stand on its own merit, but requires support by explanation. For example, of Karla Black's work of art 'Made to Wait'…

> Black's approach to sculpture is often described as holistic: her assemblages are more than the sum of their parts; each element interconnects physical, psychological, and theoretical stimuli, which are both self-referential and relate to art as a wider-world experience.

Furthermore

> …these ideas become inherent, almost as an anchor, in the piece's literal and metaphoric suspension which blurs the bounds between perception and introspection, self-cognition and otherness[209].

The meaning of the work does not appear to be clarified by this explanation. Karla Black's work consists of cellophane daubed with cosmetic and medical products such Vaseline, lipstick and hair conditioner, and forms playful and sensitively crafted situation specific sculptural assemblages extended through the galleries. She paints with

---

[208] MACMILLAN, D. 2010b. *Duncan Macmillan: A price worth paying for the modern artist* [Online]. news.scotsman.com. Available: http://www.scotsman.com/news/duncan_macmillan_a_price_worth_paying_for_the_modern_artist_1_825667.

[209] 2011. Karla Black
EXHIBITED AT THE SAATCHI GALLERY.

cosmetic products in flat simple colours, perhaps evocative of Joseph Beuys works of art. Certainly, her work is understandable in terms of such modern expressive art. We should probably be sceptical therefore that her work of art is the 'literal and metaphoric suspension which blurs the bounds between perception and introspection, self-cognition and otherness'.

Macmillan might suggest that the explanation is muddled at best, and probably empty of meaning. Black's works of art should be moving and engaging, but the explanation does not allow her work to speak for itself. It is the pretentious explanation, the claim to deeper privileged meaning that prevents us from experiencing the true meaning of Black's works of art.

The risk is that the explanation becomes more important than the artwork itself. Namely, works of art such as Karla Blacks are less important than the explanations of them. However, to reiterate, the explanation of a work of art is not interchangeable with the work of art itself; there are entirely different forms. A written explanation of a painting cannot replace the experience of the painting itself.

Therefore, from Macmillan's perspective, the explanation provided by the Saatchi Gallery is essentially empty and without meaning.

Perhaps however the following example may be illuminating:

Jane, a third year Art, Philosophy and Contemporary Practice student studying at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design in Dundee. What she understands to be the poetic complexity of ideas within contemporary art explanation, she finds fresh, dynamic and progressive. The digital arts/performance art scene excites her, and she believes that DJCAD is on the leading edge of within the wider international art community. Jane's understanding of contemporary art is immersed in Art History,

critical theory and contextual studies, and she has an ability to collaborate, reflect, write, present, and communicate the complexity of her creative process.

Jane's understanding of the explanation of Karla Black's work by the Saatchi Gallery is therefore subtly different to Professor Macmillan's, and inextricably bound to her personal experience of contemporary art writing. To her, the phrases used in the Saatchi Gallery have all sorts of associations with contemporary critical art writing that embrace diversity and paradox, although she agrees that the text may be a little too open-ended, and lacking rigour.

The qualities and characteristics of works of art and their explanation take on different meanings depending upon the associations we make, and as they shift from context to context. As we have seen, Hagberg argues that explanation of art and music demands sensitivity to context. A work of art and its explanation can be difficult, or even bafflingly meaningless from one point of view, but perhaps not from another. Lack of meaning may be determined simply because we do not have a particular layer of knowledge about an artist, a group of artists, or a particular theoretical underpinning. Moreover, it may actually be necessary that good works of art are particularly hard to understand.

However, whether we are attempting to understand a work of art shrouded in the fog of history, or we are considering a demanding, complex and obscure contemporary work of art, seeing things from different angles becomes the vital key to explanation: understanding different and often difficult points of view.

It is not so much that justification is not necessary, as Macmillan suggests, but that it is inevitable, and inevitably, there are as many explanations as people viewing the artwork. All explanation should be embraced in its complexity and difficulty. It is vital to grasp that the changing of ones point of view changes the work of art.

Furthermore, where we begin our explanation changes the whole meaning of the work of art. If we begin looking at my paintings from the viewpoint of the image of a 1960's tin toy space rocket, it may create a whole range of personal associative meanings to do with childhood, nostalgia, memory, innocence and play. This is wholly different if we begin our examination with the image of the Holy Trinity, which may lead us to religious and spiritual interpretations. Alternatively, if we begin by examining the formal qualities of the painting, the meaning may be determined by successes and failures within an art historical framework, or may lead us into a completely new area of significance related to the role of craft, technology, skill in art, for example.

This is again wholly different from an understanding that focuses on symbolic plurality and mythic comparitivism within the work: which may lead us to relations of historic, social and cultural importance.

Depending on our starting point, the relations between elements changes so deeply that the nature of the whole art piece changes fundamentally.

Professor Macmillan's historical aesthetic formalism offers a rewardingly clear, informative, entertaining and authoritative perspective on the meaning of works of art. However, this unifying approach somehow makes all works of art seem the same, all playing the same game, to the same rules, which clearly they are not.

From an individual perspective, this unifying approach limits the extent to which we can embrace the difficulty, individuality and uniqueness of each individual creative process, and of each work of art. It denies the multitude of examples of forms of discovery, experimentation and interpretation. We should not accept such generalities that can blind us to the differences between each work of art, and within works of art themselves.

The desire to provide an agreeable general declaration about art deters us from seeing the individual case, in all its infinite, manifold difficulty. In fact, the indistinctness of our inner awareness of the work of art makes it quite impossible to assign any single reductive external explanation. Consequently, Hagberg leads us to two discoveries:

Firstly, the explanation of a work of art is external to the work itself. Secondly, we should be wary of imposing the elegance of conceptual neatness on the messiness of individual creative approaches. In order to understand the work of art we must embrace the complexity of meaning, and identify all the subtle and difficult interrelations within it. According to Hagberg, such associations are infinite, which explains the inexhaustibility of many works of art.

The illumination of a particular explanation is beautiful, but made more beautiful when additionally illuminated by other explanations. It is not that Professor Macmillan's explanation of painting is wrong, or that any particular explanation is wrong, it is that no one explanation represents the soul of the work of art.

Yet the process of making art is predominantly understood in terms of the 19thC Romantic model of artist and artwork: in terms of the solitary artist sensitively reflecting upon inner experience, and manifesting such experience in artwork. Yet artwork should not be understood solely in terms of the feeling that the art object gives, which the artist has somehow integrated with the finished work of art. The comparative study of myth demonstrated by Campbell (1949) and Levi-Strauss (1963) has demonstrated that consideration of context introduces us to very diverse ways in which the basic terms of art can be understood. Romantic aesthetic theory is not the only possible way of conceiving the processes involved in our understanding of art experience, and anthropological studies might bring us to ask if this mode of understanding really is applicable to all current aesthetic approaches. Certain

experimental features of 20thCentury art do not seem to fit this model offered by psychoanalysis and Romanticism.

Extracts of Stanislaw Lem's novel *HMV* ran parallel to the main text, from which it was identified that if we do not consider historical, cultural and biographical context, then we run the risk of losing grasp of meaning, and projecting ourselves darkly.

Projection is the psychological explanation of a process that 'involves the attribution of unacceptable thoughts, feelings, traits or behaviours to others that are characteristic of oneself…in projection it is the disowned aspects of self that are transferred onto others[210].

The words of St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:11-12 seem to express recognition of the phenomenon of Projection. The implication is that even though we outgrow childish projections, now we have adult ones:

> When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly.

Yet neither should we depend entirely upon historic and scientific explanations of art. Rather it is necessary to be sceptical of all explanation, and to understand that the process of art encompasses a rich diversity of often-contradictory elements and processes. Stanislaw Lem's novel *HMV* provided a satirical parallel to the conflicting approaches to art explanation. *HMV* represents the limitations to apparently straightforward communication due to such elements as personal and political ambitions of scientists undermine the seemingly pure process of interpreting the MFTS. This is a continuing theme in Lem's work: using wry humour to be deeply sceptical towards

[210] CRAWLEY, J. G. A. J. 2002. *Transference and Projection: Mirrors to the Self,* Maidenhead Open University Press. Pg. 18

explanation. His novels such as Fiasco (1987) demonstrate a distrust of narrative literature that is at the service of politics, stemming from his early experience of political dictatorships in Eastern Europe. In Fiasco, The book is the fourth in Lem's series of pessimistic first contact novels, following Eden (1959), Solaris (1961) and The Invincible (1964). It deals with concepts of otherness. Lem is highly critical of human nature and he demonstrates the Prometheus like tale of how the crew of a spaceship's desire to initiate contact with an alien civilization, and take a leap forward in scientific knowledge by any means available, guarantees the failure of the mission, and the destruction of the alien civilization.

7.3 *Ossian* and Loss of Culture

Therefore, this thesis questions positive notions of objectivity in relation to art, in the way that an understanding of art is relative to its social and historical context.

The Scottish national epic *The Poems of Ossian* became important to this study for its potential to communicate mythic themes of universality rather than division, and also because it represents a violent but heroic loss of culture. *Ossian* embodies powerful archetypal motifs of heroism, loss and historical defeat that are a shared experience, recognised, empathised with and replicated in many countries.

However, this thesis noted that the importance of James Macpherson's *Ossian* also occurs in the many ways in which it is problematic. Yet this was not a lazy appeal to cultural relativism, instead, *Ossian* becomes more interesting because it is problematized by the assumptions and social practices that produced it, and these resonate with our own time, not least my own experience in Bosnia.

7.4 More Explanations

There are many potential ways to explain my paintings. Perhaps, for example, my paintings are a projection of some archetypal facet of my core identity revealed when exposed to the appropriate Greek myth. Contextualising biographical data may reveal something of the way in which aspects of my anima and animus compete, and that these paintings reveal within the shadows of the artwork, the shadow that is within me. The viewer, looking at the paintings, may feel anxious, reflecting their own dread of otherness: an effect encouraged by the gloomy theatre of chiaroscuro.

The previous paragraph embodies several approaches to the explanation of my artwork. If I refer to the bridge, mountain, or sheep, I am explaining the paintings in representational terms. If I refer to the character of the line contrasting with the density of the masses, then I am considering formal concerns. If I consider what I was attempting when I created the artwork, as earlier, then I am using a model based upon artist intention. When I talk about what that the spectator is supposed to feel and experience, then I am talking about the psychological effect of the work of art that may consider reception theory, semiotics, or phenomenology. In addition, if I attempt to identify my inner response to particular experiences embodied in the work, such as Bosnia, I may be assuming the 19thC Romantic model. Each of these types of explanation is built upon unique underlying assumptions about the nature of our experience of art. A mythic explanation of painting can appear within any of these explanations, but depending on the type of work of art described may not even appear at all.

7.5 Wittgenstein's Reflections on Myth

Wittgenstein's reflections offer a way of considering myth that resonates with a contemporary suspicion of objectivity in the humanities. Importantly, bearing in mind

my experience of Bosnia, this approach embraces ideas of difference and diversity. His concept of 'family resemblance' demonstrates difference within a category, as a way of opening up and problematicising various terms. This holds significance for the deeper understanding of art by artists working within academic models that require explanation.

7.6 A Suspicion of Explanation

If we do not challenge our deepest assumptions about what art actually is, we cannot talk about our art in any meaningful way. Artists often mistake mystification and obfuscation for art, and risk not being to say anything at all. Plato understood this, and was suspicious of the artist's process that he suspected was often unreliable, disreputable or derivative. He felt that artists became so lost in their work that it failed to build on any sense of personal, or community foundation[211].

Yet understanding art is not like trying to find the missing remote control for the TV, a process that concludes once we find it behind the sofa. Art is a continuing open-ended process of interpretation. Art is not about understanding, but also about experiencing. Explaining art in this sense is problematic, and all the more interesting, because art is a unique way of thinking and researching that involves a diversity of potentially contradictory processes and elements that cannot be reduced to explanation. Therefore art research is flawed only if it attempts to offer a clear and unified explanation. Books are full of attempts to reduce artwork to a photograph and few sentences, but the artwork itself - its inconsistencies and obscurities – are the clearest and most obvious explanation. The creative processes of myth and art are not failed branches on the tree of scientific progress; they are something much more strange and wonderful than that.

[211] LONE, A. 2002. *Nature Exposed to Our Method of Questioning,* London, Diatrope Press.Pg. 124

7.7 Conclusion: Painting as Multi-form Aesthetic Experience

Necessarily, this thesis has engaged with a vast subject area. Interest in the art objects themselves - the series of seventeen paintings - gave way to a concern for the way in which art is communicated, determined by the contextual socio-cultural nexus of viewer/ art interaction. The nature of the issues-involved demands such an approach, and I believe has led to some interesting conclusions for those interested in contemporary art, and for the art practitioner.

Art denies restriction to a single unifying explanation, and it is damaging to deploy ill-considered conceptual frameworks onto this extraordinary aesthetic world. Explanations of art diminish or ignore entirely the vital question of how the sophisticated interplay of social events combine historically and materially with individual experience, a broad array of theoretical backgrounds, and human values of justice, morality and truth, to produce the rich and diverse experience of art.

7.8 The Greek myth of *Procrustes*

Painting is profoundly non-explainable. This argument is a recapitulation of Lem's analysis of the irreducibility of literary studies to mathematics[212]. Nothing can alter the fact that every painting is subject to the interpretability of its viewers, and irreducible to a single unifying explanation. Appropriately, Lem compares this situation to the Greek myth of *Procrustes*:

In Greek mythology *Procrustes* (the Stretcher) was an innkeeper who attacked people, stretching them, or cutting off their legs to make them fit the size of a beds at his inn. Procrustes was finally captured by the Greek hero Theseus, during his final adventure

[212] SWIRSKI, P. 1997. *A Stanislaw Lem Reader,* Illinois, Northwestern University Press. Pg. 111

on his journey from Troezen to Athens, during which Theseus "fitted" Procrustes to his own bed by decapitating him.

The metaphor applies to indiscriminate attempts to make the experience of art fit explanations of art. As we have seen, explanations of art either are condemned to damaging simplification, or fall headlong into the abyss of relativism. Further difficulties include issues of arts precise ontological position, still in the early stages of development academically. In addition, there are destabilising issues of factuality and authenticity, as the reception to James Macpherson's 1765 *The Poems of Ossian* attests: much of art is fiction, and therefore, a lie. Art is a uniquely diverse form of knowledge that embraces numerous actualities that we do not fully understand.

7.9 Two Final Examples

Can we explain the way in which the experience and emotion of human atrocity such as Bosnia is communicated in art? We are all familiar with the many forms of electronic media that communicate such events. It is understandable that news, on the television and the internet, for example, serve to communicate feelings of dread at the terrible predicament of people in countries other than our own. The following examples may add something to this understanding:

1. An art student, for example, is involved with a college project to develop in video a montage of news stories. She may be feeling the frustration at the perceived agenda of BBC, and becomes angry with the BBC for not interviewing local Bosnians involved in the tragedy, Instead the student feels that the news in a sense dehumanises Bosnians, by not engaging with them as individuals human beings, but instead representing the Serbs, Bosnians, and Croats as a collective other, all of whom who are probably as bad as each other.

2. A mother and father have returned to Bosnia in order to help rebuild the country, and establish their family home, working with British charity organizations such as Edinburgh direct aid. Watching the news on television, they feel…nothing…tired. They are watching the lavish Orthodox Christian Christmas celebrations because these are the channels that give the best news coverage. Abruptly at the news that a Serbian war criminal has been caught (tactlessly designated by a playing card), the couple launch themselves from their sofa, hugging, laughing and roaring with excitement.

The preceding two paragraphs clearly introduce an uncertainty and strangeness to this conclusion. They are unexpected deviations from the apparent narrative of the text, and we do not immediately understand their relationship to the argument or what the author (myself) intends to do here. The voice of these two paragraphs seems different to the rest of the section. This is because they represent further examples of Hagberg's thought experiments, based upon Wittgenstein approach to explanation, deduced from his examination of myth. Wittgenstein felt that explanations of myth failed to represent the inherent strangeness and complexity of the experience of myth.

In Bosnia, winter of 1999, I met people deep who were, I believe, in shock and mourning, but reconstructing their lives, and returning to some sense of modern European normality. My hosts were my guide in Bosnia, Ramiz Subasic and his wife Raifa. Ramiz and his family spent time in Scotland asylumed temporarily in North Berwick Sports Centre, Raifa receiving treatment for post-traumatic stress. Ramiz explained to me, '…before the war, we were all friends and neighbours: Bosnians, Serbs, Croats', he said, 'then one day the tanks came over the hill, and everything changed'. Raifa showed me photographs on her mantelpiece and pointed to friends and neighbours from before the war and said '…dead, dead, dead, dead…' . There were of course moments of humour during the trip, such when I was driving back to Edinburgh,

a Croatian border guard, pointed to the words *Humanitarian Aid (Humanitarna Pomoc)*, on the side of the lorry, and asked me drolly if I was taking aid to help the people of Scotland.

Yet more than 150,000 people died in the conflict, and over 2.2 million people were displaced, nearly half the current population of Scotland. I remember Bosnia in terms of Ramiz and Raifa; clear blue skies over snow covered and forested hills, and the general post war devastation. Serb tanks had eradicated all Muslim architecture and culture from Yugoslavian history, violently and strategically. I remember the surrounding fields covered with thousands of small white wooden grave markers, identified by tiny black crescents, without which these parts of Bosnia could easily be mistaken for parts of the Scottish Highlands.

During the course of this PhD study, I have found it impossible to settle on a satisfactory unifying explanation of the artwork that I developed in response to my experiences. The multitude of issues that emerged from this complex and problematic area of study reinforce the conclusion that, despite the various authoritarian methods of explanation, we require the humility to accept that art is irreducible to explanation. The importance of painting, arises from the diverse and complex ways in which we understand it. It is humbling to realise that we cannot understand painting in either a purely sensory, or a purely intellectual way.

Every painting is subject to the interpretation of its viewers, and as Lem says, without the proverbial 'eye of the beholder', an art-piece cannot exist[213].

We could not, or would not, wish to resolve the issue of art explanation. Therefore, it is understood that this study ultimately cannot be resolved. Yet this thesis has identified key areas for the subject of future critical discourse. Future research is required to study:

[213] Ibid. Pg.106

1. The problematic identity of art, and the extent to which it is an object of the imagination. To disassemble and re-evaluate assumptions of grand aesthetic theory, using numerous examples from practicing artists, and grounded in socio-cultural context.
2. The vital question of how the interplay of social events combines historically and materially with individual experience, and a multiplicity of theoretical backgrounds, to produce the rich and diverse experience of art.
3. The *fit* of theory to the individual artist's rigorous attention to the visual, sonorous, or tactile human cultural experience that we call art.
4. The diversity of art explanation that exists beyond material formalism, in order to reintroduce essential human values such as morality, ethics, and truth.
5. Encourage the wider art-theoretical community to assimilate Wittgenstein's reflections on myth, and his argument in the philosophy of language.

Finally, Professor Hogarth began to recognise that the various theories applied in order to understand the MFTS were not providing a satisfactory explanation of the alien senders intended message. Instead, the MFTS became a sort of Rorschach test that projected the apprehensions of the scientists here on earth. Hogarth speculated that the message contained two ingenious but separate messages, one of which may destroy inappropriate civilization on earth, not worthy of apprehending the true message. He wrote in his journal:

> This fantasy too, I rejected. The image of a civilization that was supposed to annihilate, in so unusual a way, the "degenerated" or "retarded," I dismissed as yet another projection – onto the unknown of the letter as an "association test" – of the fears characteristic of our age, and as nothing more.

Bibliography

Contemporary War Artists: Peter Howson: Bosnia [Online]. Imperial War Museum Collections. Available: http://collections.iwm.org.uk/server/show/ConWebDoc.912.
Dictionary.com [Online]. Available: http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/irony.
Online Etymological Dictionary. Available: http://www.etymonline.com/index.php.
Online Etymology Dictionary [Online]. Available: http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=robot.
Web Gallery of Art [Online]. Available: http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/html/i/ingres/index.html.
2011. Karla Black
EXHIBITED AT THE SAATCHI GALLERY.
ALBERTI, L. B. 1435 Reprint edition 2005. *On Painting,* London, Penguin Classics;.
ALDRICH, R. J. 2002. *America used Islamists to arm the Bosnian Muslims*

The Srebrenica report reveals the Pentagon's role in a dirty war [Online]. The Guardian.
ALEXANDER MOFFAT, A. R. 2008. *Arts of Resistance: Poets, Portraits and Landscapes of Modern Scotland,* Haddington, Luath Press.
ALLEN, G. 2003. *Roland Barthes (Routledge Critical Thinkers),* London, Routledge.
ALLEN, S. B. W. (ed.) 1991. *Interpreting Contemporary Art,* London: Reaktion Books.
AUSBAND, S. C. 2000. *Myth and Meaning, Myth and Order,* Macon, GA, Mercer University Press
AVILA, T. O. 2008. *Interior Castle,* Radford, Wilder Publications, 2008.
BAXANDALL, M. 1988. *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style,* Oxford, Oxford University Press.
BBC. 2011. *milosevic_yugoslavia* [Online]. Available: http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/in_depth/europe/2000/milosevic_yugoslavia/rise.stm.
BENJAMIN, A. (ed.) 1989. *The Lyotard Reader,* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
BODKIN, M. 1934. *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry: Psychological Studies of Imagination,* London, Oxford University Press.
BORGMANN, A. 1999. *Holding on to Reality,* London, The University of Chicago Press.
BROWN, D. R. 1970. A Look at Archetypal Criticism. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism,* 28.
BROWN, P. M. G. 1995. Fearful Symmetry: Symbolic Aspects of Early Technologies. *World Archaeology,* 27**,** 88-99.
BULL, M. 2006. *The Mirror of the Gods: Classical Mythology in Renaissance Art,* London, Penguin Books.
BUMSTED, J. M. 1981. *People's Clearance: Highland Emigration to British North America, 1770-1815*
Winnipeg, University of Manitoba.
BUXTON, R. 2004. *The Complete World of Greek Mythology,* London, Thames and Hudson
CAESAR, M. 1999. *Umberto Eco: philosophy, semiotics, and the work of fiction,* London, Polity.
CAMPBELL, J. 1949. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,* New York, Pantheon Books.
CAMPBELL, J. 1968. *The Masks of God: Creative Mythology,* New York, The Viking Press.
CONNER, R. 2010. *Russellconner.com* [Online].
COUPE, L. 1997. *Myth,* London, Routledge.

CRAWLEY, J. G. A. J. 2002. *Transference and Projection: Mirrors to the Self,* Maidenhead Open University Press.

DANTO, A. C. 1997. *After The End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* Princeton, Princeton Paperbacks.

DAVIS, T. F. W., KENNETH (ed.) 2002. *Formalist Criticism and Reader-Response Theory,* London: Palgrave Macmillan

DOSS, E. 2006. The Visual arts in post 1945 - America. *In:* JEAN-CHRISTOPHE AGNEW, R. R. (ed.) *A Companion to Post-1945 America.* New York: Wiley-Blackwell.

DUFF, C. J. D. 2007. *Scotland, Ireland, and the Romantic Aesthetic (Bucknell Studies in Eighteenth-Century Literature and Culture),* Bucknell, Bucknell University Press.

DUFFY, M. H. 1995. Michelangelo and the Sublime in Romantic Art Criticism. *Journal of the History of Ideas,* 56**,** 216-238.

DUNLOSKY, J. B., R. A. (ed.) Handbook of Metamemory and Memory [*Handbook of Metamemory and Memory [*London: Psychology Press.

ECO, U. 1989. *The Open Work,* New York, Harvard University Press.

ECO, U. 1994. *The Limits of Interpretation,* Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press.

EDWARDS, M. 2001. Jungian Analytic Art Therapy. *In:* RUBIN, J. A. (ed.) *Approaches to Art Therapy: Theory and Technique.* New York: Brunner- Routledge.

ELIOT, W. S. S. G. O. T. S. (ed.) 1963. *Five Approaches of Literary Criticism,* London: Macmillan Pub Co.

ELKINS, J. 2001. *Why Art Cannot Be Taught: A Handbook For Art Students,* Chicago, The University of Illinois Press.

ELKINS, J. 2003. *Visual Studies A Sceptical Introduction,* New York, Routledge.

ESSLIN, M. 1968. Naturalism in Context. *The Drama Review: TDR,* 13.

ESSLIN, M. 1980. *The Theatre of the Absurd,* London, Methuen Drama.

FOGLE, D. (ed.) 2001. *Painting at the Edge of the World,* Minneapolis: Walker Art Centre.

FOSTER, H. 1996. *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century,* London, The MIT Press.

FRAZER, S. J. 1993. *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion,* Ware, Hertfordshire, Wordsworth Editions Ltd.

FRYE, N. 1971. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essay,* Princeton, Princeton University Press.

GASKILL, H. 2004. Introduction: Genuine poetry...like gold'. *In:* GASKILL, H. (ed.) *The Reception of Ossian in Europe.* London: Continuum.

GEAHIGAN, T. F. W. A. G. 1997. *Art Criticism and Education,* Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press.

GERSHMAN, H. S. 1963. Surrealism: Myth and Reality. *In:* SLOTE, N. F. B. (ed.) *Myth and Symbol: Critical Approaches and Applications.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

GILL, G. R. 2006. *Northrop Frye and the Phenomenology of Myth,* London, University of Toronto Press.

GIORGIO VASARI, G. B. 1987. *The Lives of the Artists: a selection (Volume II),* London, Penguin Group.

GOLDING, J. 1995. *Visions of the modern,* London, University of California Press

GOLOMB, J. 1995. *In search of authenticity: from Kierkegaard to Camus,* London, Routledge.

GREENBERG, C. 1960. The Voice of America. Available: http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/modernism.html.

GREENBLATT, C. G. S. 2000. *Practicing New Historicism,* Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.

GRENZ, S. J. 1996. *A Primer on Postmodernism,* Cambridge, Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co.

GRETENKORT, D. (ed.) 2010. *Georg Baselitz: Collected Writings and Interviews,* London: ridinghouse.

HAGBERG, G. L. 1995. *Art as Language: Wittgenstein, Meaning, and Aesthetic Theory,* New York, Cornell University.

HALL, M. B. 1994. *Color and Meaning: Practice and Theory in Renaissance Painting,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press; New Ed edition

HARRIS, R. 1990. *Language, Saussure and Wittgenstein: How to Play Games with Words (History of Linguistic Thought),* London, Routledge.

ICTY. 2011. *United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia* [Online].

JACOBSEN, H. F. M. H. A. F. J. A. W. T. 1963. *Before Philosophy: The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man,* Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Penguin Books Ltd.

JANCOVICH, M. 1993. *The Cultural Politics of the New Criticism,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

JNR., G. S. (ed.) 1989. *A Franz Boas Reader: Shaping of American Anthropology, 1883-1911,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

JUNG, C. 1922-1941. *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Sky,* London, Routledge.

JUNG, C. 2003. *The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature,* London Routledge Classics

KAREN, H. 1999. *Neurosis and Human Growth (International Library of Psychology),* London, Routledge; Reprint edition (July 1999).

KERSHAW, S. 2007. *A Brief Guide to the Greek Myths: gods, monsters, and the heroes of storytelling* London, Constable and Robinson.

Warriors, 1999. Directed by KOSMINSKY, P. U.K.: BBC.

KRISTINE STILES, P. H. S. 1995. *Theories and documents of contemporary art: a sourcebook of artists' writings,* Berkeley, University of California Press.

KUSPIT, D. 2006. *GIRODET'S SENSATIONALISM* [Online]. Artnet. Available: http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/kuspit/kuspit8-16-06.asp.

L.C.KNIGHTS, N. F. (ed.) 1958. *Myth and Symbol,* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

LACAPRA, D. 2000. *Trauma, Absence, Loss.* [Online]. Available: http://www.dactyl.org/thought/LaCapra_press_release.html.

LANGER, S. K. 1957. *Philosophy in a new key: A study in the symbolism of reason, rite and art,* London, Harvard University Press.

LEE, R. 1967. *Ut Pictura Poesis: Humanistic Theory of Painting (Norton Library titles in art, architecture and the philosophy of art)* New York, W. W. Norton & Co.

LEERSON, J. 2004. Ossian and the rise of Literary Historicism. *In:* GASKILL, H. (ed.) *The reception of Ossian in Europe.* London: Continuun books.

LEM, S. 1973. On the Structural Analysis of Science Fiction. *Science Fiction Studies,* 1.

LEM, S. 1983. *His Master's Voice,* New York, Northwestern University Press.

LEVI-STRAUSS, C. 1963. *Structural Anthropology,* London, Basic Books.

LIEBS, H. 2006. *Nothing can embarrass me anymore* [Online]. Sight and Sound.com. Available: http://www.signandsight.com/features/972.html.

LONE, A. 2002. *Nature Exposed to Our Method of Questioning,* London, Diatrope Press.

LYOTARD, J. F. 1979. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* Manchester, Manchester University Press.

MACDONALD, M. 2004. Ossian and Art: Scotland into Europe via Rome. *In:* GASKILL, H. (ed.) *The Reception of Ossian in Europe*
London: Continuum.

MACDONALD, M. 2010. Art as an Expression of Northernness: The Highlands of Scotland. *Visual Culture in Britain***,** 355-369.

MACMILLAN, D. 1986. *Painting in Scotland: The Golden Age,* Oxford, Phaidon Press Limited.

MACMILLAN, D. 2010a. *Art: Lessons from a past master on making a good impression* [Online]. news.scotsman.com. Available: http://www.scotsman.com/news/art_lessons_from_a_past_master_on_making_a_good_impression_1_825093.

MACMILLAN, D. 2010b. *Duncan Macmillan: A price worth paying for the modern artist* [Online]. news.scotsman.com. Available:

http://www.scotsman.com/news/duncan_macmillan_a_price_worth_paying_for_the_modern_artist_1_825667.
MALCOLM, N. 1994. *Bosnia: A Short History,* London, MacmillanPublishers Ltd.
MALRAUX, A. 1978. *Voices of Silence: Man and His Art,* New York, Princeton Univ Pr.
MANNS, J. W. 1997. *Aesthetics (Explorations in Philosophy)* London, M.E. Sharpe.
MICHAEL J. PARSONS, H. G. B. 1993. *Aesthetics and education,* Champaign, Illinois, University of Illinois Press
MORE, J. 1897. The Falls of Clyde (Corra Linn). National Gallery of Scotland Bequest of James Ramsay MacDonald.
NEWMAN, J. E. M. (ed.) 2008. *The State of Art Criticism,* New York & London: Routledge.
NORTHROP FRYE, R. D. D. (ed.) 1991. *Myth and metaphor: selected essays, 1974-1988,* Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.
PANOFSKY, E. 1998. 'Et in Arcadia Ego': Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition. *In:* PREZIOSI, D. (ed.) *The Art of Art History* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
PENNER, H. 1998. *Teaching Lévi-Strauss,* Illinois, Oxford University Press.
RANK, O. 2008. *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero: A Psychological Interpretation of Mythology* Charleston, South Carolina, Forgotten Books.
RHEES, R. (ed.) 1979. *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough,* Chippenham and Eastbourne: The Byrnmill Press Ltd.
ROSS, S. D. 1982. *A theory of art: inexhaustibility by contrast*
New York, State University of New York Press.
ROSS, S. D. 1994. *Art and Its Significance: An Anthology of Aesthetic Theory* New York, State University of New York Press.
SEGAL, R. A. 2004. *Myth, a very short introduction,* Oxford, Oxford University Press.
SHARROCK, D. W. F. E. C. C. W. W. 1998. *Perspectives in Sociology: Classical and Contemporary* London, Routledge.
SHEPPARD, A. 1987. *Aesthetics: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art* Oxford, Oxford Paperbacks.
SMITH, D. M. J. 1998. *Social science in question,* London, Sage Publishing.
SMITH, K. L. (ed.) 2004. *Handbook of Visual Communication: Theory, Methods, and Media,* London: Routledge.
SWIRSKI, P. 1997. *A Stanislaw Lem Reader,* Illinois, Northwestern University Press.
TÜMPEL, C. 2006. *Rembrandt: Images and Metaphors,* London, Haus Publishing Limited.
VAUGHAN, W. 1978. *Romanticism and Art,* London, Thames and Hudson World of Art.
WALKER, S. F. 1990. (Review) Joseph Campbell: An Introduction by Robert A. Segal. *The Journal of American Folklore,* 103**,** 372-374.
WARBURTON, N. 2003. *The art question,* Abingdon, Routledge.
WESTWELL, G. 2009. Film review: The Hurt Locker. *Sight and Sound.*
WILLIAMS, K. C. A. J. (ed.) 1988. *The Lyotard Reader and Guide,* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd.
WISEMAN, B. 2007. *Levi-Strauss, Anthropology, and Aesthetics,* London, Cambridge University Press.
WITTKOWER, R. 1987. *Allegory and the Migration of Symbols,* New York, Thames and Hudson.
ZENGOTITA, T. D. 1989. On Wittgenstein's Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough. *Cultural Anthropology,* 4.
ZENGOTITA, T. D. 1989 On Wittgenstein's Remarks on
Frazer's Golden Bough. *Cultural Anthropology,* Vol. 4, .
ZIMMER, H. R. 1972. *Myths and symbols in Indian art and civilization,* Princeton, Princeton University Press.